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American Film

Magazine of the Film
and Television Arts

November 1982

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IT WAS



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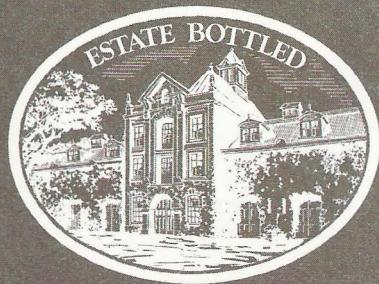
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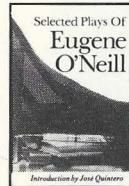
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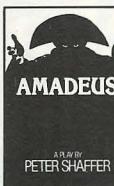
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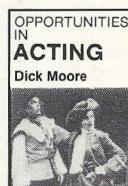
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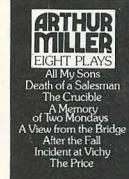
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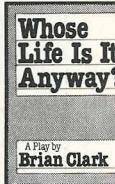
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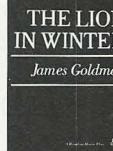
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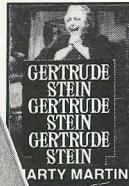
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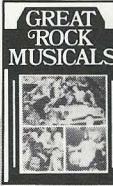
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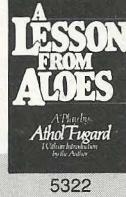
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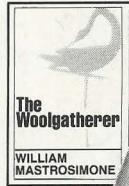
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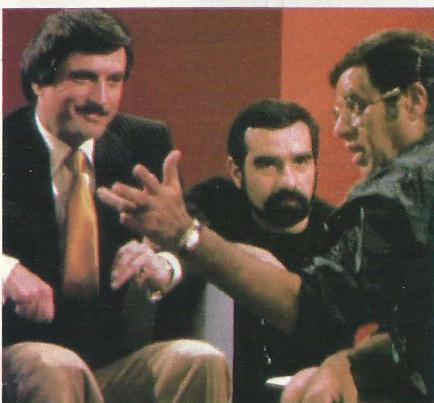
JEAN FIRSTENBERG, *Director*

American Film

Magazine of the Film and Television Arts

Volume VIII Number 2

November 1982



FEATURES

38 **How Sweet It Was** by *Toby Thompson*
Jackie Gleason is working harder than ever in movies, but liking it less.

46 **Prairie Film Companion** by *Philip Anderson*
Local Minnesota filmmakers are more concerned with making films about their own state than making deals with Hollywood.

52 **History of the (Film) World, Part II** by *Douglas Gomery*
For decades, film historians have told us the same old story. Now, the next generation of scholars, asking different questions, is writing its own version.

58 **Letter From Paris: Mitterrand's Medialand** by *Marcel Ophuls*
Has the election of a Socialist president brought a cultural revolution to French television? Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

66 **Marty** by *Carrie Rickey*
Martin Scorsese is hard at work on his new film, *The King of Comedy*, starring Robert De Niro and Jerry Lewis.

VIDEOFILE

25 **Video Boom Busts Retailers** by *Howard Polskin*
Cassettes are selling like hotcakes, but while studios waffle, video stores look for milk and honey.
Studios Demand Rent Control by *Seth Goldstein*

33 **Scanlines**

35 **Videography**

DEPARTMENTS

8 **Letters**

12 **Newsreel**

18 **Dialogue on Film: Dyan Cannon**
Coming off good notices for *Deathtrap* and *Author! Author!*, the actress pauses to discuss her future as a director.

76 **Books**
Hitler, a Film From Germany, reviewed by J. Hoberman.

93 **Trailers**

96 **From the Director** by *Jean Firstenberg*

Cover: Jackie Gleason, as he appears in *The Sting II*. Illustration by Stephen Durke.

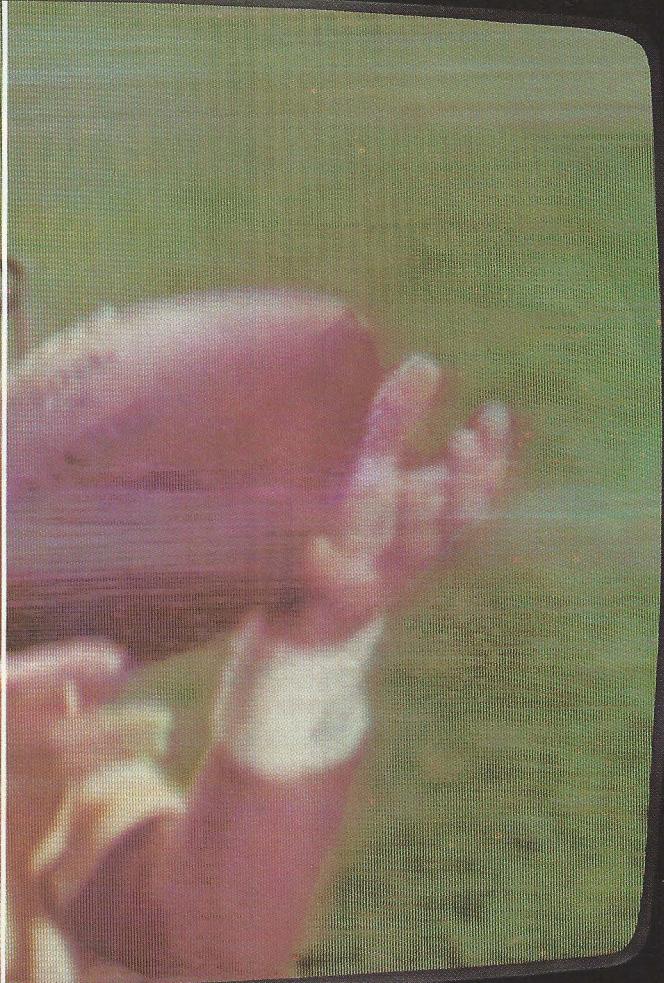
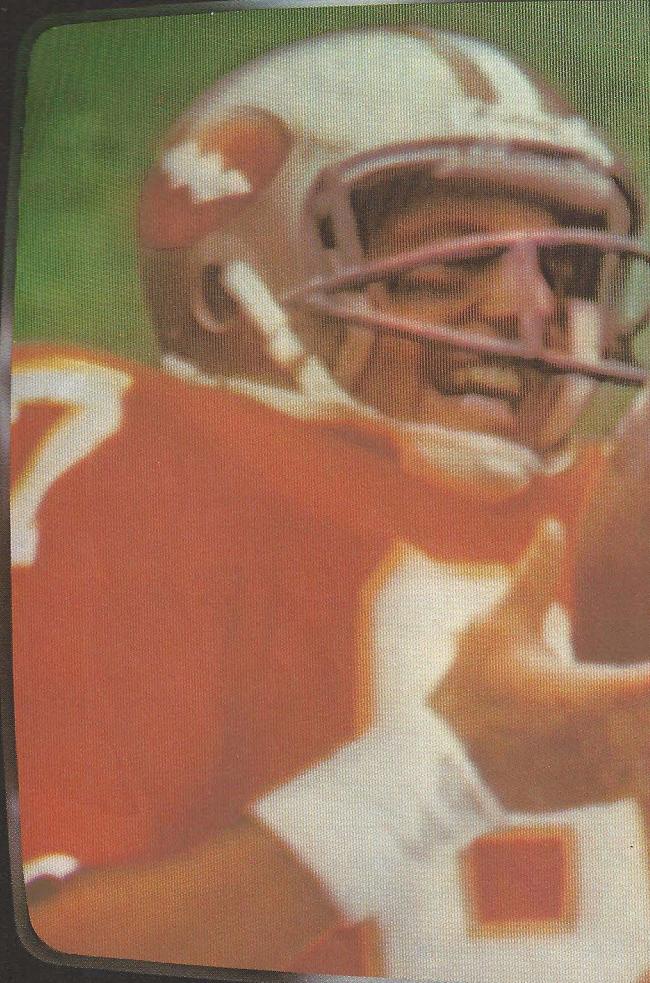
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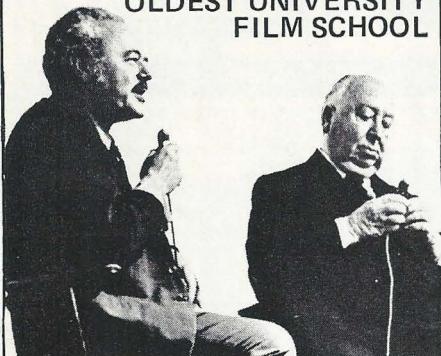
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AF

The Editing Room

Jackie Gleason, writes Toby Thompson in this issue, is "down with a bad case of having seen it all." Reporting from the set of *The Toy*, one of three films featuring "The Great One" scheduled for release this winter and spring (the other two are *The Sting II* and *Smokey and the Bandit III*), Thompson describes how the chain-smoking, heavy-drinking emperor of the golden age of television is taking his cinematic reincarnation.

Gleason is tired of the longueurs of moviemaking, unwilling to pose for publicity shots or do more than go through the gestures required of him by the studio publicity departments. He is, writes Thompson, "tired of working. But there is something in his personality that won't let him quit," something under his skin that drives him forward to work in a medium that both bores and frustrates him, even though he has never quite managed to master it.

Not that Gleason hasn't had his memorable moments. He'll always be remembered for snookering Paul Newman in his role as Minnesota Fats in *The Hustler*, back in 1961. Since then, though, his film career has not exactly prospered. He is so entirely a creature of the Philco era that he doesn't seem to travel well. But, on the other hand, why should he have to? Gleason's place in the hearts and minds of baby boomers who grew up with Ralph Kramden and Joe the Bartender is secure. □

When we asked Marcel Ophuls to write a piece about the impact of the policies of the Mitterrand government on France's state-run television network, he didn't want to. Somewhat of a libertarian, he doubted whether Mitterrand's intentions toward a medium as important as television could be altogether honorable. But, as a Mitterrand supporter, he didn't want to be put in the position of, as he put it, encouraging "Beverly Hills entrepreneurs" to sneer at "European intellectual pinkos."

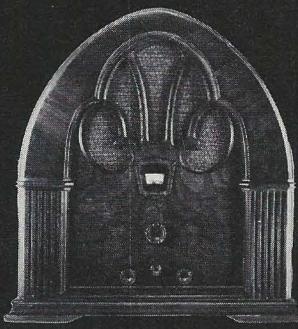
After a lengthy exchange of letters, some of which Ophuls reproduces in his piece, he agreed—on the condition that the criticisms he would make of the French he could make of the Americans as well. Several years after the enormous success of *The Sorrow and the Pity* in the United States, Ophuls returned to France because, he says, his attempts to complete "Company Town," a documentary on Hollywood, were frustrated by elements of the film industry. ("Company Town" was later remade, as *Hooray for Hollywood*, by Alan and Susan Raymond.)

Since his return, Ophuls has been working, on and off, for French television. Although somewhat gloomy about that sector of the French audiovisual scene, he feels that its current lassitude is partially responsible for sparking a revival of the film industry. "Most people," he writes, "attribute this to the unrelieved tediousness of French television, which has taken to spoon-feeding 'culture' to the masses and showing endless series of documentaries about 'how ordinary people live.' "

"In Paris," he continues, "things being as they are, the old-time TV 'barons,' producers, journalists, and directors who have been parachuted by succeeding ministries into the state monopoly, have had many years to consolidate their bureaucratic positions, and are now given a better chance than ever before to secrete their own unique scent of ennui and slothful mediocrity. So, by decreasing the number of theatrical films (not just American ones!) on the small screen, in order to encourage 'original TV creativity,' the new audiovisual masters automatically increase the threshold of public boredom, thus driving the spectators back to the movie theaters."

—Peter Biskind

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Letters

Making Love Loved

Your September article on gay subjects on film was very well done ["Deep Focus: Gays and Film: Out of the Closet and On to the Screen," Al LaValley]. I thank you for it. Your nine critics were honest and very interesting. I'm a thirty-one-year-old gay person, and I saw *Making Love* five times. It was the most wonderful positive experience of my life. The beautiful and sensitive performance of Harry Hamlin in *Making Love* has done more for me about feeling good about myself and who I am than anything else in my life. I thank him for that. And I thank you for allowing me to say it.

Michael Davis
Woodstown, New Jersey

Gay Film Forum

As a gay male and a lover of films, I found your recent article on gay-themed films quite interesting. I would like to commend *American Film* for offering diverse gay critical opinions on this current film trend. The article offered insight into the emergence of this trend as well as critical reactions to these particular films. I was glad that it was handled so intelligently and in a way that could offer perception to moviegoers, straight and gay. It was a relief to finally see these films discussed rather than superficially praised or panned.

James Joseph Deery
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Macho Myopia

"Out of the Closet and On to the Screen" shows the usual macho myopia. In it, a male writer interviews nine males—and they issue pronouncements about the portrayal of lesbians in movies.

Despite *American Film*'s forthcoming symposium on "women's issues," it fails to see that everything is a "women's issue."

Gay, schmay. Y'all look alike to me, boys.

Marie Shear
Brooklyn, New York

Natives Savaged

It was with great interest that I undertook to read Michael Goodwin's article in the June issue ["Herzog, the God of Wrath"], having spent much time in the Amazon Basin area and in Iquitos. I must say, however, that although the article may have been a very real portrayal of the problems involved in the making of Mr. Herzog's film, and of the director himself, it did little to dispel some of the widely held assumptions concerning the people, both Indian and mestizo, of the area. This, coupled with the fact that the locals were expected to work in conditions that an engineer deemed unsafe for a meager wage (minuscule in terms of Mr. Herzog's budget, though high for the Amazon Basin), does little to dispel the idea that the people

who live in the jungles of South and Central America are little more than savages and, as such, are only to be contended with and exploited.

I would hope that in the future a publication such as yours would act to give a clearer picture of all involved in the making of a motion picture.

Janice L. Mahlberg
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Lemonade

The lemon is a versatile fruit; it is used as an astringent, a purifier, a healer. I regard Mr. Lemmon's personal philosophies and his art along those very same lines ["Dialogue on Film: Jack Lemmon," September].

Leslie Snitkoff
Aptos, California

Custom-Made Issue

On my way to lunch one day, I stopped by the library to obtain some browsing material, and the librarian suggested your September issue. Attracted by the article on Luis Buñuel, I decided to delve deeper into your publication.

I was indeed appreciative of Michael Wood's story of the director whom I had studied in my college years. However, a bigger surprise was yet to come, for as I proceeded to read, I came upon further articles on such noted foreign film directors as Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Pier Paolo Pasolini, whom I'd also studied.

And then Terry Atkinson's article "Scoring With Synthesizers" really hit home. For many years now, I have been an ardent synthesizer-music lover, and have collected all of Giorgio Moroder's scores and most of his other works. It was indeed refreshing to read about artists whose work I admire greatly. As to the fear of people becoming tired of synthesizer scores, one must bear in mind that a good composer-player can explore the endless facets of the instrument and provide much more variety than an ordinary orchestra, providing he or she limits the use of the *Star Wars*-like effects.

All in all it looks like your September issue was published specifically for me.

Mohamed Shameem
Adelphi, Maryland

American Film welcomes letters from readers. Letters for publication should include the writer's name and address and should be mailed to: Editor, American Film, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. 20566. Letters may be edited for reasons of length or clarity.

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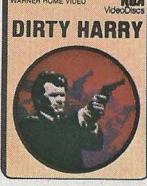
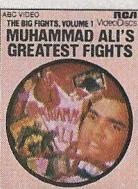
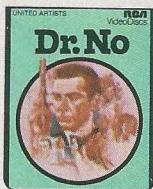
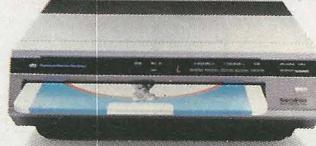
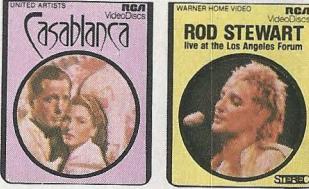
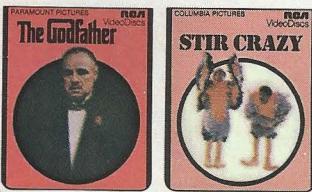
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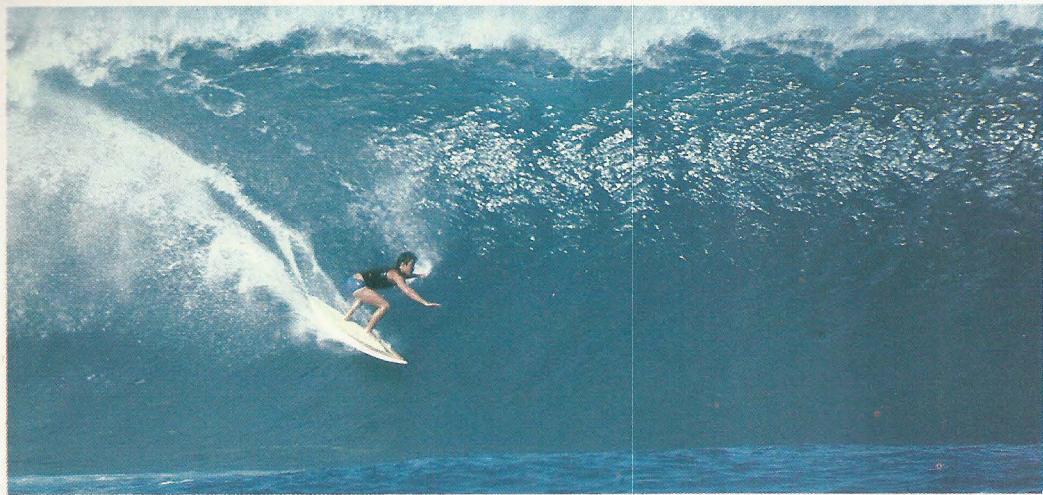
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Photo

Everybody's Gone Filming

Surf's up all along the Pacific coastline—on the screen, that is. Surfing films, a curious hybrid of hipster travelogue and sports documentary, made for surfers by surfers, have been called the only commercially viable ethnographic film industry in the country.

However, with the exception of Bruce Brown's 1966 search for the perfect wave, *The Endless Summer*, surf films have

not yet strayed far from the circuit of theaters along the West Coast. Scott Dittrich, a Malibu-based surf-film veteran who made *Fluid Drive* and *Adventures in Paradise*, describes authentic surf films as "basic, very basic. Good surfers, big waves. Hot, championship-level surfers like Mark Richards, Shaun Thompson, Joey Buran, Buttons Kaluhiokalani draw well. Exotic locales like Bali, Tahiti, Indonesia draw, too."

But what really pulls them in, he says, is wave action. "Big, monster waves, long rides, radical cutbacks, aggressive riding,

lots of action. But big waves—really big, like the thirty-footers at Banzai Pipeline, Sunset Bay, the Hawaiian North Shore during the winter swells—are the most popular item. And then, of course, spectacular wipeouts are popular, too."

Equally in demand, says Dittrich, are bikini contests—"the mammary element," he calls it. However, full nudity, overly risqué humor, and profanity are very rare in surf films. "A lot of surfers are strongly into Christianity these days," Dittrich explains. "Anyway, high schools and youth clubs rent films, and

they'll avoid one with a controversial reputation."

The old days, when the basic requirements for a surfing movie were little more than film and a smooth panning technique, are long gone. There's a reason for the new emphasis on technical quality: cable television. "Surfing is growing, which means the audience for surfing films is growing as well," Dittrich says. "If the technical aspect is up to par, there's no reason why a good film couldn't be sold to cable. To recover the production costs up front would allow a lot more films to be made. Cable could really help us, and I'm trying to make sure we're ready for it."

If surfing and surf films continue to grow in popularity, will Dittrich be worried about competition from better-financed, studio-backed competition? "Not really," he scoffs. "Surf films have to be made by surfers. If the person behind the camera isn't someone who understands what it means to be a surfer, forget it. And what surfer would ever work in Hollywood?" So far, only John Milius has managed to hang ten in those treacherous waters.

—John Kehoe

CINE at Twenty-Five

Organized in 1957 to encourage American participation in international film festivals, CINE (the Council on International Nontheatrical Events) is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. A series of screenings and diplomatic receptions will be held in Washington, D.C., November 30 through December 2.

CINE's founders were concerned that although the major foreign film festivals in Venice and Edinburgh were being deluged with American entries in the fifties, less well known but important international festivals often included no American films. CINE established

competitions for professional and amateur filmmakers, with a jury selecting films to represent the United States at foreign film festivals.

CINE's first competition chose films for only three festivals, but by last year some three hundred jurors serving in thirty-five regions throughout the country were deciding on winners from nearly seven hundred applicants. These films participated in more than ninety film festivals all over the world: in North and South America, Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, and Asia. Many films honored by CINE have won awards at international festivals, and some, like one 1981 award winner, *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (produced and directed by Con-

nie Field), have returned from abroad to enjoy successful theatrical runs in this country.



The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter received a CINE Golden Eagle Award in 1981.

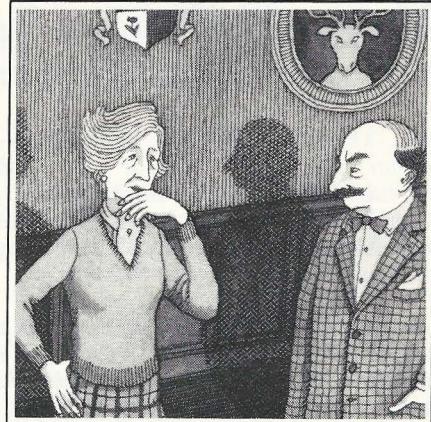
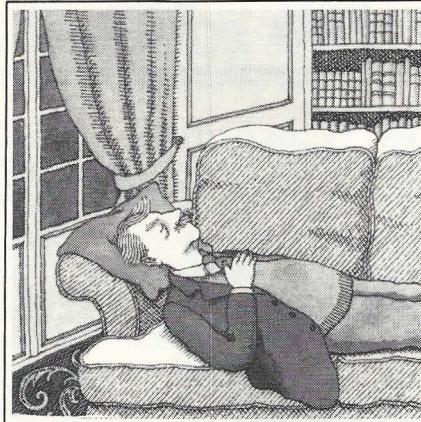
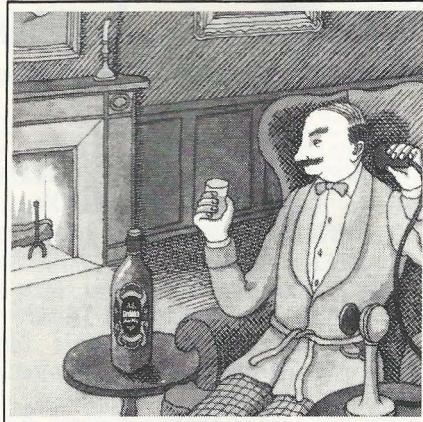
Dear Filmgoer...

For many years, the movie industry has toyed with the idea of using direct-mail marketing to sell films. But until recently, no one tried it. Paramount Pictures broke with tradition this past summer and initiated an innovative experiment. The studio is involved in testing the direct-mail marketing concept on its rerelease of *Reds*.

During the summer, Paramount contracted with Richard Parker and Associates, a marketing firm in San Francisco that specializes in direct mail for progressive groups, causes, and candidates. This fall, the firm sent about a hundred thousand solicitation letters to potential moviegoers in three test

Continued on page 16

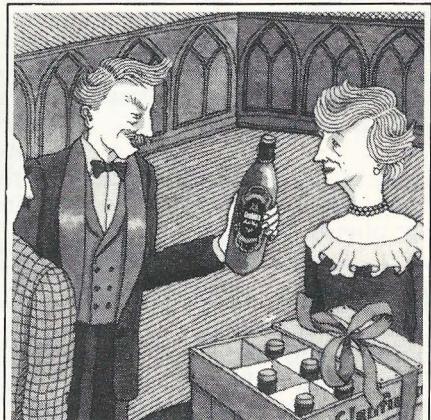
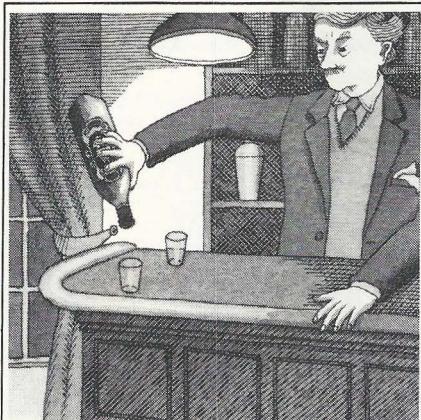
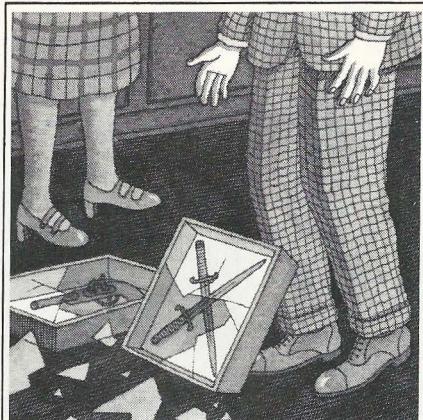
THE CASE OF THE IMPECCABLE PRESENT



I was nursing a nip of *Glenfiddich* when I received an urgent call from Lady Harriet Hollyhock. "You must help me!" she pleaded. "I can't decide what is more fitting for my husband...the gun or the dagger."

Did Lady Harriet have designs on her husband's life? Setting aside the celebrated single malt, I raced to Hollyhock Manor. But I was too late! For there, on the couch, lay the body of Lord Henry Hollyhock.

I found Lady Harriet upstairs. "I believe in giving Lord Henry exactly what he deserves!" she cheerfully exclaimed. "He deserved better," I coldly replied, demanding that she hand over the deadly weapons.

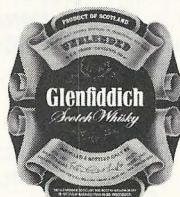


What she handed me was a pair of elegantly framed antique armaments. Unfortunately, they slipped from my hands and clattered to the floor. At that, a familiar voice bellowed from below, "I'm trying to take a nap!"

"Now what will I give Henry for the holidays!" Lady Harriet wailed as I dashed to the parlor. An unharmed Lord Hollyhock stood behind the bar. "Hello!" he cried. "I'd offer you a *Glenfiddich*, but we seem to be out."

As it turned out, Lord Hollyhock received *Glenfiddich*. "And I was afraid you'd give me another bloody antique!" he chortled. Whatever the occasion, a gift of *Glenfiddich* is proof of impeccable taste.

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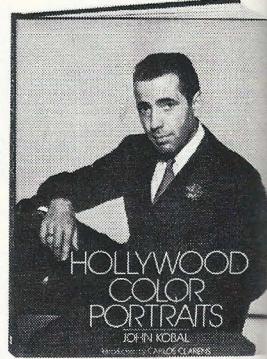
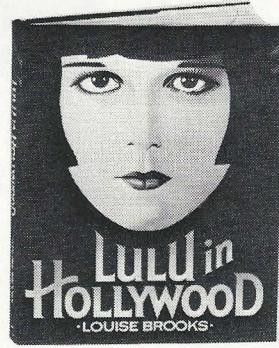
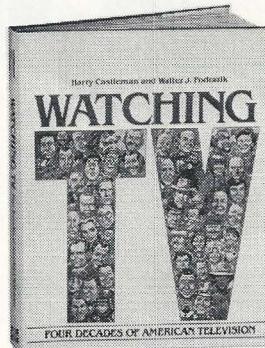
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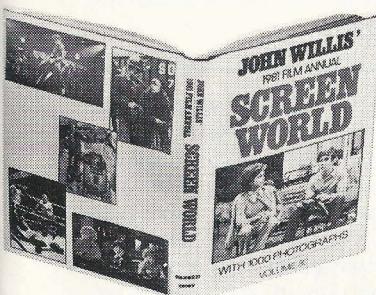
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From page 12

cities. The idea was to target a movie audience that might not otherwise line up at the box office. It's rumored that Paramount had become increasingly dissatisfied with the results of its massive print and broadcast ad efforts—spending an estimated \$118 million last year—and decided to try direct mail.

Using zip code zones to identify likely neighborhoods, the Parker firm hopes to identify an audience for *Reds* that was not reached before by other advertising. The studio could single out opinion leaders, offering them discounts on admission to the movie, in the hopes that these people would generate more admissions by word of mouth. Test results should be in this month from the letters mailed in September and October. If the results look good, Paramount will reportedly move to a five-million-piece mailing in the spring.

Lloyd Kieran, an account executive at Rapp & Collins, a direct-mail firm associated with Doyle Dane Bernbach, thinks direct mail could be a useful tool for publicizing films. "If the studio can match demographics with a profile they identify as potential viewers of a movie, then it's a very interesting concept and quite testable," he says.

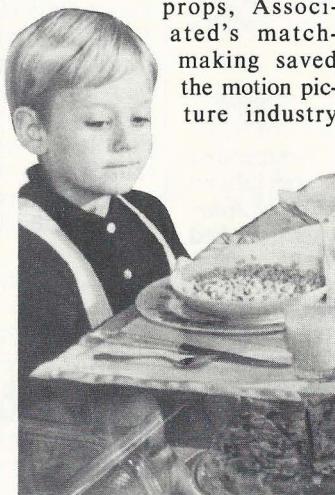
But Eliot DeY. Schein, president of Schein-Blattstein Advertising in New York, doubts that a movie studio advertising, say, love stories or comedies could target neighborhoods where romantics or people with a sense of humor reside. "It's impossible," he concludes. "To try and match zip code lists or census tracts to a movie subject makes no sense whatsoever. Readers of direct mail are not likely to go to the movies. Moviegoers are young people and young people don't read solicitation letters. They don't read anything."

Schein thinks a better idea would be to market videocassettes of *Reds* through the mail, offering discounts to buyers.

—Amanda Spake

Free on a Match

"We're like marriage brokers; we save film companies time and money," says Robert Kovoloff, president and founder of Associated Film Promotions, a Los Angeles firm that matches its corporate clients' products with films needing props. Budweiser beer was one of Associated's contributions to *Poltergeist*, along with Royal Crown Cola, Wheaties, Strokey Van Camp canned goods, and Cheerios. Kovoloff estimates that by providing complimentary props, Associated's match-making saved the motion picture industry



more than \$3.5 million in 1981.

Corporations make their products available free of charge to filmmakers in exchange for the publicity. The products aren't promoted on the screen; they simply appear in the background or are used by actors as a natural part of the plot. Among Associated's eighty corporate clients are Nikon, Quaker State Motor Oil, General Foods, Procter & Gamble, and Mastercard.

This Christmas, you'll be seeing Associated's product tie-ins in several movies. Glenfiddich Scotch,



Faye Dunaway, as Joan Crawford, serves Cheerios for breakfast in *Mommie Dearest*.

Rating Ratings

When a group of unaccompanied five- to thirteen-year-olds in Meridian, Michigan, tried to see *Animal House* a couple of years ago, they were barred from the theater. Their outraged parents hollered age discrimination and took the theater owner to court. This June, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled in favor of the exhibitor's right to ban children under seventeen from R-rated films.

At the same time, the Dallas Motion Picture Classification Board told MGM/UA that *Poltergeist* could not play in that city unless the film's PG rating was changed to an R. The studio fought the Dallas board and won a

court ruling to keep the PG.

While many big-city cinemas ignore the ratings system, permitting youngsters their fair share of screen sex and violence, small-town theater owners often take it all quite seriously. Recently, they've been pushing for a new rating, midway between PG and R; and the motion picture industry is considering several, including an R-13, which would bar young children but not teenagers, and a PG-M, which would alert parents to mature material.

The National Association of Theatre Owners, according to its president, Richard H. Orear, has agreed to look into changes in the ratings. Orear says many theater owners have received complaints from patrons that some films contain violence,

Dunkin' Donuts, and Cadillac will all have supporting roles in *Six Weeks*, starring Mary Tyler Moore and Dudley Moore. Mattel Intellivision, Maverick Jeans, Frito-Lay snack foods, and Wild Turkey bourbon appear with Jackie Gleason and Richard Pryor in *The Toy*.

It doesn't seem to matter whether products are used by heroes or villains. If people see them in movies, Kovoloff says, they're more likely to buy them.

sex, or vulgar language too strong to carry the PG rating. Other moviegoers, however, complain that a lot of R-rated films aren't strong enough to have attendance restricted. "Goody-goody stuff is no longer their cup of tea," Orear explains, referring to how children's tastes have changed over the years. "Kids today don't want that kind of thing. They want to see more sophisticated entertainment."

Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, says any changes in the ratings system are still in the discussion stage. So, for the time being, teens and preteens in most towns can enjoy a healthy scare or a guilty pleasure with or without their parents.—Douglas K. Daniel

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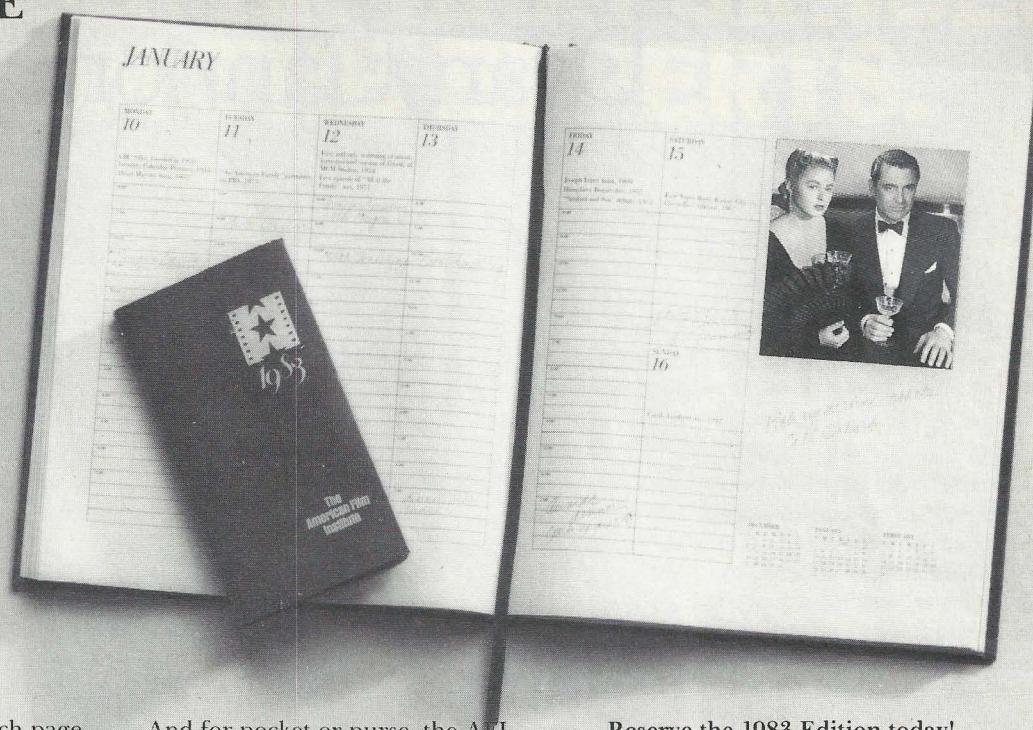
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Dyan Cannon

Coming off good notices for *Deathtrap* and *Author! Author!*, the actress pauses to discuss her work as a director.

In 1969, the New York Film Festival, an event usually stuffed with serious works by established foreign directors, presented a satire on life in Southern California directed by an unknown American named Paul Mazursky. The film was *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*, and Alice was played by an equally unknown blonde actress named Dyan Cannon.

In the years since, Mazursky has risen steadily to prominence, but for Dyan Cannon the road has been a little rockier. Her engaging performance in *B&C&T&A* earned her an Oscar nomination, but critics complained that roles in subsequent films didn't capitalize on her gifts as a brassy comedienne.

Discouraged by the kinds of parts she was being offered, Cannon dropped out of acting for several years. In 1976 she wrote, directed, and produced a modestly budgeted short, *Number One*, which was nominated for an Academy Award. Dyan Cannon was back.

Since *Number One*, Cannon has returned to acting, this time in strong films like *Heaven Can Wait* and her two most recent releases, *Deathtrap* and *Author! Author!*. In the Dialogue, Cannon discusses the controversy over *Number One* and her role as writer-director-producer.

The Dyan Cannon seminar was held in cooperation with the Screen Actors Guild Conservatory, and was arranged and conducted by Darrah Meley.

Question: Were you always interested in acting?

Dyan Cannon: Oh, yes, absolutely. At five

and six I was producing plays in the garage.

Question: But you studied writing?

Cannon: I wanted to be in the theater section at the University of Washington, but the students were all part of a special breed. They wore long hair and sandals and were different looking and didn't really belong. I needed to belong much more than I needed to act, so I stayed with things that were more popular.

Question: How did your acting career get under way?

Cannon: I was working for a dress manufacturer in downtown Los Angeles, and I was having lunch on the Sunset Strip with several girl friends. A man came up to me and announced that he was an agent and asked me if I was an actress, and I said,

An inquiry into the arts and crafts of filmmaking through interview seminars between Fellows and prominent filmmakers held under the auspices of The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies.

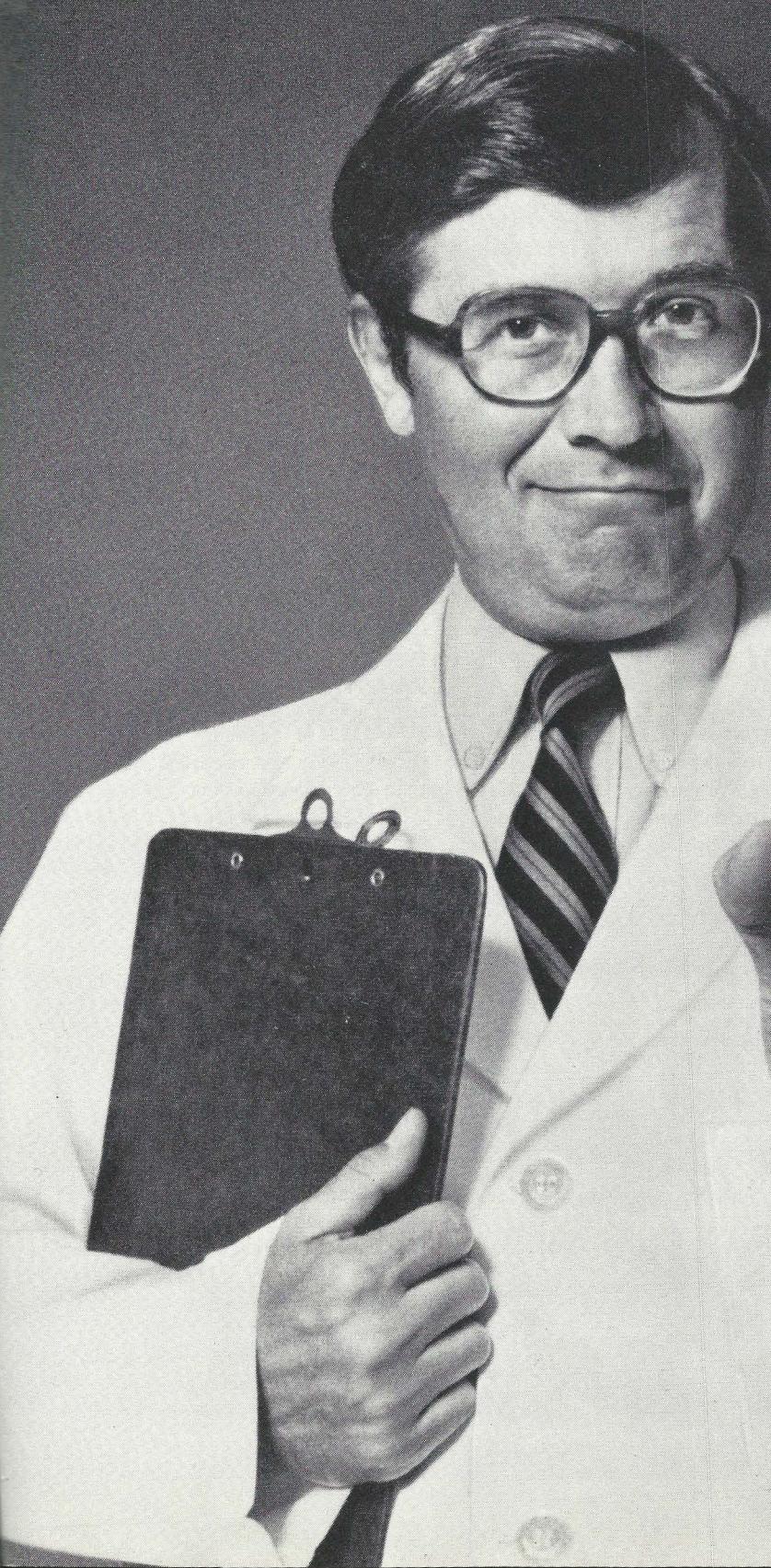


Esquire Magazine

"Of course I am!" He asked me what I had been in, and I named all the plays I had ever read. "But you're too young for those parts; those are character parts." I said, "I do anything." He said that Jerry Wald was making a film at Twentieth Century-Fox called "Jean Harlow" and they would like to have me come out and test for it. I said, "Test for it! What does that mean?" I went downtown to my boss, and I said, "I don't know what this big deal is about it being so hard to be a movie star in this town! I was just discovered." Then I said, "I'm leaving here. I'm going to be an actress." Naive, really! So I met Jerry Wald and he said, "What's your name?" I said, "Diane Friesen." He said, "Oh,

wait a minute—I see cannons and explosions. What about calling you Dyan Cannon?" I said, "Fine." Can you believe that? **Question:** It didn't get you the job, though. **Cannon:** You know why? They said my nose was too flat. The acting wasn't bad. This man who wanted to be my agent called me and said, "Your nose is not one of those noses that photograph perfectly." And I said, "What can we do about that?" He said, "There are plastic surgeons in this town." In those days, I was a nice Jewish girl, and all the other nice Jewish girls I had met in Los Angeles had mink stoles, and I had called my mom and dad and said I wanted one, too. I quickly made another call to them and said that instead of a mink stole I wanted a nose job. This is all true. So I went to this wonderful doctor, and I said, "I want you to change my nose." He said, "I want you to leave my office. Your nose is just a part of what makes you different. You don't look like everybody else. Be

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After *Child Under a Leaf*, I didn't know whether I wanted to be an artist any more—because it hurt too much.

proud of what you are!" That was the first time I ever heard that from anyone in my life—that *not* being like everyone and maybe looking a little offbeat and maybe being a little different could work for me, instead of against me. So I didn't have it done.

Question: Weren't you hired some time after to go on a promotional tour for *Les Girls*?

Cannon: MGM interviewed hundreds of girls and hired three. They said if we went around the world publicizing this movie, we would have careers. It was actually a very good training ground. In every major city where we appeared, advance publicity would say that we were the fastest-rising starlets in Los Angeles and that we were in the film. Which we were not! But people who had never heard of me would yell, "Yea Dyan," and they would go in and see the movie and come out and say, "You were wonderful!" After about six months of that, I thought, This is *really* something: They believe what you tell them out there; they can even look at a movie and think they're seeing you if the publicity says you're in it! I thought, This is scary.

I made a lot of money. MGM gave each of us a \$25,000 wardrobe—I'd just come from clearing \$49.50 a week working in downtown Los Angeles. I came back and the studio said, "Thank you very much, but we don't have any use for you as an actress." It was all a very interesting education. But something wasn't right. And then

I heard of Sanford Meisner, who was coming from New York to teach acting.

Question: He had been directing and teaching at the Neighborhood Playhouse.

Cannon: Yes, and he was going to pick thirty people from all the applicants in Los Angeles and teach them for one summer. I went and auditioned, and I was one of the thirty chosen. The press people handling him wanted to pick one person and see if they could build an unknown through publicity, and Sandy suggested me. So that was kind of how it started. I got into the acting thing and worked with other people who were interested in the substantial part of acting, rather than the glossy part. I am very grateful for that experience, because if I hadn't had it, perhaps the gloss of Hollywood would have meant more to me than it has. It has meant nothing to me.

Question: Didn't Meisner recommend you for *The Dingaling Girl* with Eddie Albert on "Playhouse 90"?

Cannon: I don't know if he did or not, but I got the job. He was very, very influential. Directors like John Frankenheimer would come and audit our acting classes.

Question: Your first big break was *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*. How did that come about?

Cannon: I was doing a play in Chicago, *Ninety Day Mistress*. I had starred in it on Broadway. It didn't quite have a ninety-day run, either. Clive Barnes said, "Dyan Cannon was extremely nubile," and I had to run to the dictionary to see what that

meant. It means "marriageable"—in the play I don't get married. While I was doing the play, I was sent two movie scripts. With one came a firm offer, a five-picture contract at Universal Studios; this was after not working for three to four years. The other offer was a chance to test for a part in *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*. I had to make a decision that night. I read the first script and it was a comedy, it was fun, and, God, it was a lot of money. But I went with the test because it was such a good part. I just had to take a shot at it. One of my agents said, "Go for it," and I did.

Question: The script went through a lot of changes. Did you add to it?

Cannon: I did not add *one* word—those were Paul Mazursky and Larry Tucker's words. I can't say that for any movie I have done since.

Question: With *Child Under a Leaf*, didn't you feel you were finally going in a direction that you wanted to go?

Cannon: I did. Unfortunately, the film didn't go in the direction that I wanted it to go. It showed a full-bodied woman, and there were not many films in this town then (or now) that showed women, *women*, as mothers and lovers and little girls and grown-ups, all being one person, as we *really* are. We're all called upon in our lives as women to be many things to many people all day, and no parts are written like that. This woman was married and she had a lover and she had a baby with her lover and her husband was—God, it was a part! I read the script, and thought, This is going to be wonderful. When I saw the finished movie, it was not wonderful. It had no substance. The best work I'd ever done, but it doesn't matter if you're good in a picture that doesn't work. The *whole thing* has to work.

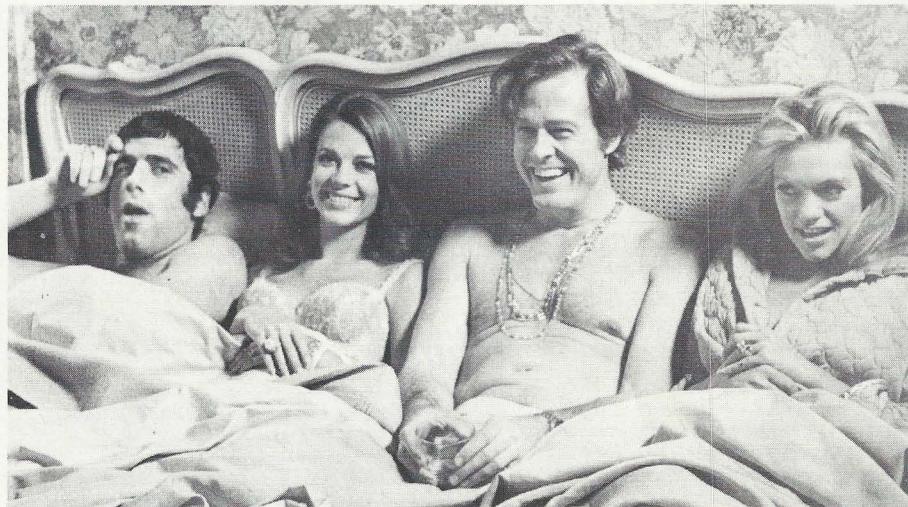
Question: What do you look for when you read a script?

Cannon: Something that has reality to it. Something that has humanity to it. *Deathtrap* was real hard for me, because when Sidney Lumet sent me the script, it was just dead on paper. Absolutely nothing. I said, "I cannot do this part, Sidney. I cannot do it." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because she's not human. I can't find anything real in her."

Question: After *Child Under a Leaf* you went through a period where you wanted to

Continued on page 84

Cannon and friends bed down in *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*.



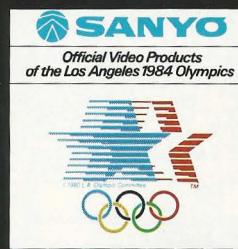


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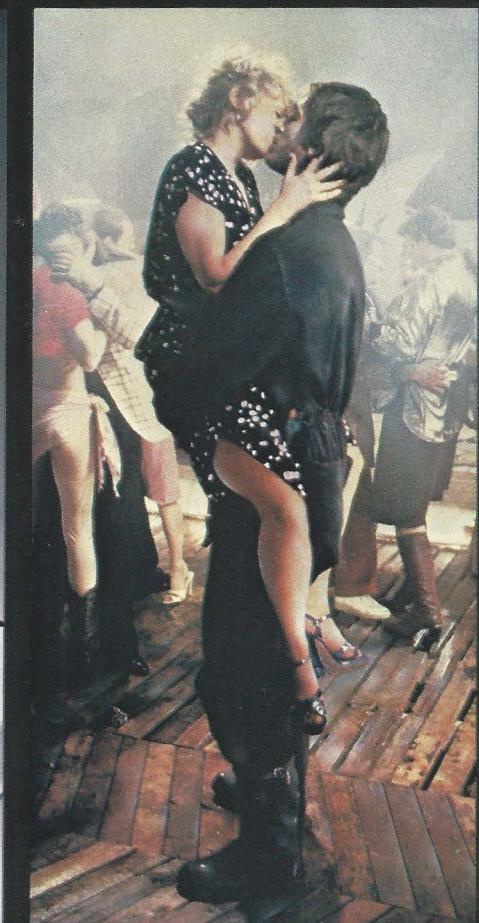
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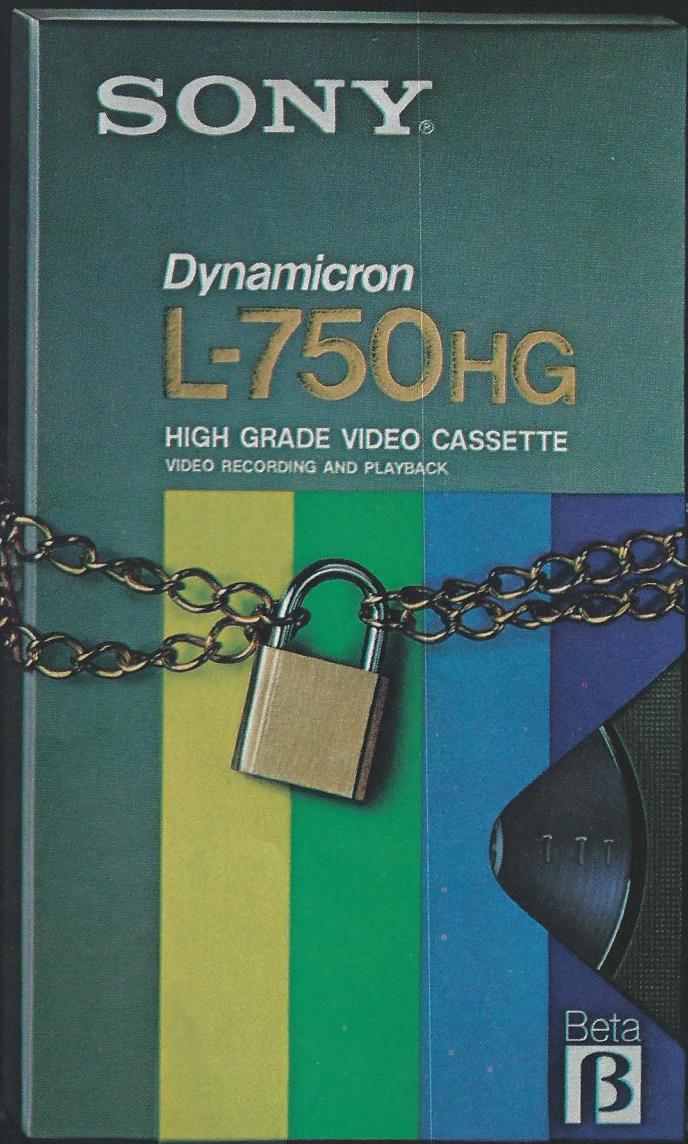
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VIDEOFILE

VIDEO BOOM BUSTS RETAILERS

Howard Polskin

CASSETTES ARE SELLING LIKE HOTCAKES, BUT WHILE STUDIOS WAFFLE, VIDEO STORES LOOK FOR MILK AND HONEY.

Editor's note: So you finally decided to become a full-fledged member of the home entertainment revolution and bought a videocassette recorder. You're looking forward to many happy hours viewing your Hollywood favorites in the comfort of your living room. But wait a minute; there's a hitch. Walk into your corner video store to buy a copy of *Chariots of Fire*. You can't. The tape is available for rental only. So you decide instead to rent *Star Wars*, but your dealer has decided to take advantage of Twentieth Century-Fox's recent decision to make it available for sale, and doesn't rent it any more. Browse through the dealer's catalog to find a copy of *Adam's Rib*, *Godard's Weekend*, or *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. None is available; indeed, you can only locate *Raiders* with the assistance of a bootlegger. You finally rent a copy of *Bye-Bye Brazil*, take it home, and invite a few friends over to enjoy the show. But when it's time to return the tape, the store is closed and there's a "For Rent" sign hanging in the window. Your corner video store has gone out of business.

The plight of the cassette consumer stems from both the parlous conditions of home video retailing and a continuing struggle between Hollywood studios that release their films on tape and retailers who

market the tapes for them. Over the past two years, the studios have developed a variety of plans allowing retailers to rent some titles, sell others, and either rent or sell additional titles at their discretion, all adding up to confusion for the consumer. Until September, for example, the only way you could have secured your own personal copy of *Star Wars* would have been to tape it yourself or buy a bootleg copy. But as of September 1, Twentieth Century-Fox took all restrictions off the all-time box-office champ, allowing video retailers to sell the tape as well as rent it. Some retailers have found, however, that they can't make a profit renting tapes, and when *Star Wars* became available for sale, a number of video stores stopped renting it altogether.



The home video business is just five years old, and the principals have yet to achieve amicable working relationships. Studios have altered their wholesaling policies with regularity, and video entrepreneurs sprout like mushrooms, each one hoping to make a quick buck in a trendy market. Most of them, however, lack the experience to make these ventures work, adding to the instability of the business. In the following report, Howard Polskin explains why all video stores aren't striking it rich, and Seth Goldstein finds Hollywood studios forsaking rental-only schemes to look for new ways to work with retailers.

If Hollywood were to make a movie about video retailing, they'd probably call it *Death Wish III*. Most of the five thousand to eight thousand video specialty stores in this country that merchandise software are fighting for their lives. Very few stores are connected to chains; according to Frank Barnako, president of the Video Software Dealers' Association, eighty-five to ninety percent are independents with a limited cash flow. About half are expected to fold within the year.

For the VCR owner, the fallout will mean fewer stores from which to buy or rent titles. So far, the customer has benefited from a marketplace bulging with thousands of titles at rental prices often cheaper than a theater ticket. But it is the dealer who must stock large inventories, keep long hours, and adjust to the changing policies of Hollywood wholesalers.

As vice-president of marketing for Columbia Video Systems, a large, prosperous electronics store in Highland Park, Illinois,

Gene R. Kahn has a better chance of surviving than most video retailers. But Kahn can only sigh when asked about the viability of merchandising video programs. "I don't think there are profit margins in video software any more," he says. If anyone would know, it would be Kahn. His store was one of the first in the country to sell prerecorded videocassettes.

In the fall of 1977, he was approached by a sales representative from Magnetic Video Corporation—the first company to market movies on videotape—to carry the company's line of products. Kahn's initial impression was crystal clear: He thought it was a stupid idea. He couldn't figure out who would pay fifty to seventy dollars to own a movie. But, in what he terms a "weak moment," he placed an order for one hundred films. "Sales were unbelievably good from the start," he recalls. "I began buying any software I could get my hands on."

Since Beta was the dominant cassette format at the time, dealers balked at buying movies in VHS. Kahn remembers buying RCA VHS recorders from a sales rep who carried them in the back of his car. It was a tough, grubby business sparsely populated by pioneers who had a vision of how Americans would prefer to be entertained in the next decade.

Soon after Magnetic Video's tapes were on dealer shelves in late 1977, the pornography industry realized the potential of home video. Pornographers took 8mm hard-core sex films and transferred them to videocassettes on technically inferior equipment. "It was virtually unviewable," says Kahn. But it sold incredibly well.

Instructional videocassettes, the next trend in software, did not. Kahn, like many dealers around the country, stocked his shelves with dance, exercise, and sports tapes. He especially remembers a Szechuan cooking tape that was produced by a company in Kansas City. He bought a few copies three years ago. They're still sitting on his shelves today. "The one thing we've learned in this business is that nothing but movies sells," he notes.

Today, Kahn figures that he rents about fifty titles a day. But he's still not pleased about the software business. "There's no doubt that rentals create a lot of traffic in my store," he says. "But I'm not really sure we're making money on them."

Kahn can at least hope to make money on a customer who comes to rent a movie for five dollars and walks out of the store with a thousand-dollar video camera. But

"IN THIS BUSINESS," RETAILER GENE KAHN POINTS OUT, "NOTHING SELLS BUT MOVIES."

to the estimated five thousand video specialty stores that offer nothing but prerecorded videocassettes, the outlook is bleak. "It's a difficult business to make a buck in," says Barnako, who runs five video specialty stores. "The studios keep changing the rules that affect our profits. Plus we're competing against appliance stores that are using rentals as a loss leader."

Studios with rental-only policies require stores to pay an up-front leasing fee that must be recouped before retailers can begin to make money on a particular tape. "Take a title like *Superman II*," Barnako explains. "The film studio wants us to lease it for seventy-five dollars for a six-month period. A dealer would need to rent it more than fifteen times to make a profit on it."

Even the tape stores that buy from studios to rent or sell as they wish must rent to dozens of customers to make the deal viable. Dennis Thomas, who operates a video store in Royal Oak, Michigan, says this kind of volume is hard to create. "The video business is like the theatrical film industry. Most movies only exist a few weeks as a hot commodity. The average tape has a life of four weeks as an exciting title. Then it dies."

Despite the odds against making a profit at the retail level, more video stores keep opening up. In the town of Skokie, Illinois, which is not exactly the VCR capital of the world, three video stores coexist within a block of each other.

A lot of merchants get into the software business for one simple reason: It's fairly cheap. A retailer can open up a software-only shop with about three hundred titles in Beta and VHS formats. The inventory costs will run about thirty thousand dollars. To start a retail establishment that sells video hardware, one will need at least a quarter of a million dollars in inventory.

For mom and pop entrepreneurs, opening a video software store seems like the quickest route to cashing in on the widely touted video revolution, especially in California,

where about one thousand video specialty stores have opened since 1977. Many hardy veterans of the five-year-old business resent the surge of newcomers. "Most of them are idiots," says Thomas. "They don't have the marketing intellect," complains Kahn. "They should go back and manage a 7-11 store. They're not your heavy thinkers." Barnako adds, "The guys who got into video software stores this year are the same guys who operated tanning booths last year. Next year, they'll be in video arcades. In two years, they'll run a computer software store. They hop from fad to fad. They'd do a lot better if they ran a little dry-cleaning shop."

But Len White, vice-president of sales for CBS/Fox Video (formerly Magnetic Video), thinks that the newcomers are becoming sophisticated. "I don't get inquiries like: 'My aunt died and left me five thousand dollars. How do I get into the business?'"

According to White, a year and a half ago the market became saturated on the wholesale and retail levels. For example, in 1981 there were 118 wholesalers peddling his product to stores; in some markets he found as many as 8 wholesalers vying for the business of the same group of stores. Today there are only 39 total. "This business can be compared to the gas station industry," says White. "A few years ago, there were four gas stations on every intersection. Now there are two. But people can still get gas."

Most of the established retailers agree that saturation is no longer the biggest problem in the software business; rentals are. At one time, when the studios ignored the stores' rental revenues, rentals were profitable. Then the studios decided they wanted their share, and now many retailers feel that their profits from rentals are seeping into the hands of the studios.

"It's killing the video business at the retail level," moans Thomas. "You just can't make a profit. There's more book-keeping. There's more staff to hire. I have to increase my hours to satisfy the guy who wants to return a tape on the way home from work. A lousy fifty-dollar investment takes two or three months to recoup. If I had my choice, I'd abandon rentals altogether. I can make enough money on sales."

"I've always maintained that you can't make a living on rentals," adds Andre Blay, founder and former president of Magnetic Video, who recently sold his software firm, the Andre Blay Corp., to Norman Lear's

Embassy Communications. "I wish I could wave a magic wand and make rentals disappear."

But the rental problem will not go away; even if studios deep-six rental-only plans, customers will still want to rent movies. Probably the only thing that will disappear are the video stores. An estimated three thousand are expected to fail in the next year.

Some successful merchants, like Dennis Thomas, wonder if they'll be in business in three years. "I wouldn't be surprised if everyone folded," he says. Frank Barnako,

who launched his first video store in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1979 and later opened four more stores in three states, says he's barely made a profit from software. He's plowed all his money back into inventory. "I'm like everyone else in the retail video business," explains Barnako. "I'm not really sure I've prospered. There's only one good reason why I've been able to stay in business for three years and expand. I've had an understanding bank."

Howard Polskin is a New York-based writer who specializes in new electronic media.



STUDIOS DEMAND RENT CONTROL

Seth Goldstein

Despite store owners' claims that retailing videocassettes is a tougher way to make a living than selling snow cones in Siberia, home entertainment is big business. In 1981 studios sold retailers some five million cassettes, about sixty percent above the 1980 mark and miles above the six hundred thousand or so delivered in 1978, the first full year of home video activity. If you figure the wholesale price of a cassette at fifty dollars, retailers paid the studios about \$250 million in 1981. This year's sales seem to have leveled out, despite a thirty-five percent growth in the number of videocassette recorders sold. Burned by the rise of rentals with marginal retail profits, store owners bought fewer tapes from studios in 1982. But even with a no-growth business, the studios aren't losing money in home video.

Twentieth Century-Fox and Paramount

are the video industry leaders, each accounting for twenty percent of the business, followed by Columbia, MCA, and MGM/UA (each worth ten to fifteen percent) and Warners and Disney (five to eight percent), with a host of independents like Media Home Entertainment composing the remainder. It costs at most twenty-five dollars to duplicate and package a movie, leaving the studios with a tidy profit.

With one significant exception, Hollywood had never sold anything in its history before the arrival of home video. That exception, of course, was the sale to television stations in the early fifties of some of the studios' movie libraries—deals made in haste and repented over the next three decades. Never again, said the studios, and most of the majors decided to stick to what they did best, that is, leasing films to theaters and the networks.

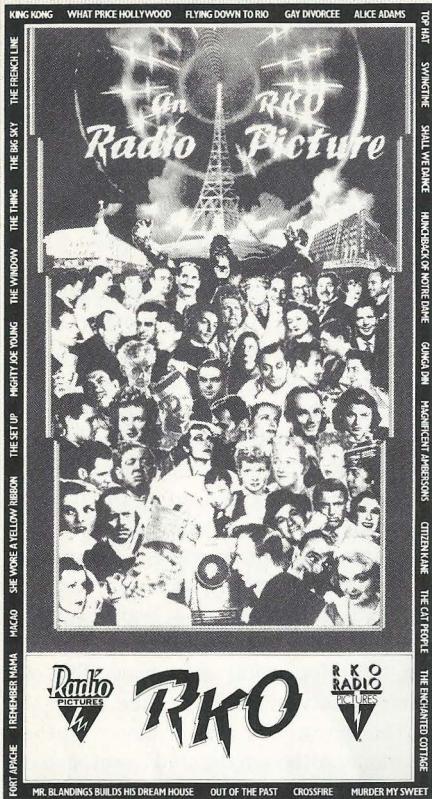
The model of theatrical leasing guided the studios when they entered the home video market. The studios thought they could sell videocassettes to retailers and yet retain control of them. They forbade merchants from doing anything but selling tapes; rentals, swaps, and exchanges were all verboten.

Store owners bitterly resisted Hollywood's attempts to tell them what they could do with products they'd bought and paid for. The controversy intensified a few years ago when retailers began to rent tapes intended only for resale by Hollywood wholesalers. The studios understandably resented being cut out of the profits from products they'd created and financed, and responded with rental-only plans in order to share rental profits with retailers.

Of the major studios, Fox, Warners, Disney, and MGM/UA all started to license some titles for rental only, generally for periods of several months, after which—like *Star Wars*—the movies moved to the sales mode. Although the studios suspected that their restrictions might be hard to enforce, they hoped that retailers would go along, if only to avoid being cut off from the source of a valuable product line. That dependency, however, worked both ways. Once the studios discovered the potential of home video, it didn't make sense to alienate the retailers who made the bonanza possible.

Ironically, the boom in VCR sales—from a total of one million by December 1979 to three million by December 1981 to perhaps five million by the end of this year—coupled with the seeming ease of software entry, has only exacerbated the battle between the studios and the stores. More and more dealers today have to rent at lower and lower prices to compete, all the while hoping that revenues are sufficient to both pay for inventory and purchase the next round of hit movies (and in two videocassette formats, Beta and VHS). As Walt Disney Telecommunications president Jim Jimirro told the audience at a trade meeting in Cannes last fall, too many dealers with too much product are chasing too few customers. He emphasized that retailers were being forced to carry five hundred to seven hundred titles to be competitive, and "there isn't a retail store in America that can handle that kind of inventory." If anything, the situation has worsened since, with releases increasing to one hundred or more a month.

To Jimirro, the solution continues to be a rental plan, one that allows Disney to share



LIVES ON!

In these four new releases from Hollywood's most original studio:

() **RKO STAR POSTER** This luxurious Art Deco-style 21" x 38" poster is printed on heavy red, gold, black, white and silver stock and features more than 50 RKO greats from Fred Astaire to Fay Wray. Shipped with photo key in sturdy mailing tube. **\$10.**



Collectors edition T-shirts hand-screened on quality 100% U.S. cotton blanks. Indicate size below: S/M/L/X.

RKO FLASHING TOWER Grey, white and lt. blue on navy. \$10.

ROSEBUD This design taken from original sled.
Yellow, green on red. \$10.

RKO TRIANGLE FLASH LOGO Red on white and very exciting. \$10.

California res. pls. add 6% sales tax. All prices include postage/handling.

My name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Make check/m.o. payable to TSI: 1716 Main Street:
300 Venice, CA 90291

STUDIOS OFFERING RENTAL PLANS SAW THEMSELVES AS WHITE KNIGHTS, SAVING RETAILERS FROM COLLAPSE.

in those rental revenues through up-front leasing fees, and helps curb the retailers' appetite for purchases—regardless of whether they want to diet or not. In fact, Disney has offered its accounts a choice of sale, rental, or both, but Jimirro clearly would like to limit the option to rental-only. The studios offering rental plans—all but Columbia, MCA, and Paramount—envisioned themselves as white knights, saving the retail trade from collapse. Warners, Disney, Fox, and MGM/UA all developed separate plans, but have all caught equal hell from retailers.

In a sense, the movie companies are damned if they do and damned if they don't. Stores complain about the extra paperwork involved in working with four different rental plans, yet, at the same time, are horrified at the notion that the studios might consolidate their schemes. The studios themselves are scared off by the antitrust implications of banding together to make wholesale policy. Early in 1980, for example, Columbia Pictures senior vice-president Larry Hilford announced that his studio was ready to enter into a rental partnership, only to withdraw the offer a few months later when no volunteers from Hollywood's ranks stepped forward. Hilford left the studio, and no one or nothing since has convinced Columbia that any rental scheme, separate or combined with other studios' plans, is worth adopting.

Columbia hasn't missed anything but headaches. Warner Home Video (WHV) executives, meanwhile, have feasted on Excedrin. WHV went from sale-only to become the industry's first rental-only setup in September 1981. The terms were stiff—for example, all the video outlets' WHV inventory had to be returned for repackaging—the reception stormy, and the results mixed at best.

By December, it was clear that Warners wasn't progressing as quickly as it had expected, that retailers weren't ready for such a radical change, and that revisions were in order. In January, Warners loos-

ened some of its restrictions and at the same time put a slew of titles back in the for-sale category.

Still, until recently, Warners was saying that customers were lining up to reserve for future rentals such titles as *Chariots of Fire*, *Arthur*, and *Superman II*, but those hits didn't seem like enough to satisfy retailers. Take the curse of the well-stocked shelf. "The better you're doing, the worse you look" is how Paramount executive Bob Klingensmith describes the appearance of rental-only retailers who strive to keep inventory at a minimum. Because of the cost of participating in rental plans, stores limit themselves to relatively few copies of blockbuster titles and try to get customers to reserve them well in advance as a way of generating the number of "turns" needed to pay off the investment.

But what about VCR owners who drop in on the spur of the moment to rent *Arthur* or MGM/UA's *Shoot the Moon*? If they're turned away, they might be turned off—even when the movie has become available for sale. The studios don't have a ready answer for this. But neither can the retailers satisfy Hollywood's search for a way to share in rental revenues.

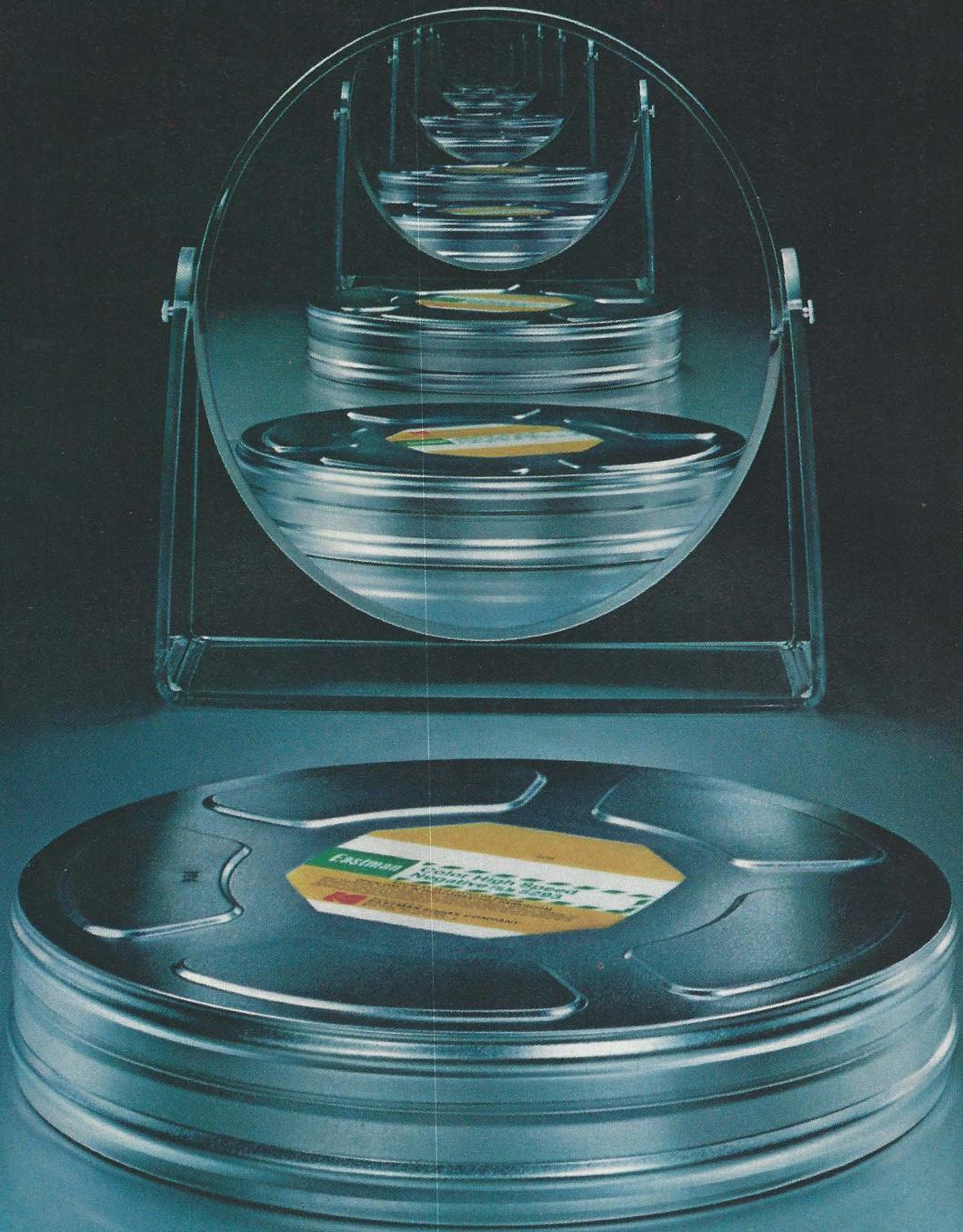
In the last few months, the studios have decided that the only plan that has proved workable is the one available from the start—do nothing at all. Faced with a steady drop in the number of cassettes that stores are leasing for rental, Warners, MGM/UA, and CBS/Fox are suspending their rental-only efforts. Only Disney is left with its dual-inventory plan. There has been little in the way of official announcements—after all, no one likes to brag about failures. But by the end of the year, insiders predict that rental-only will be just a memory.

Retailers have clearly won this round. But it could be a Pyrrhic victory. The studios are lobbying Congress for permission to dictate retail terms, as in the theatrical film business. In turn, the studios promise the store owner lower prices and a product customers will want to buy, not rent. Ultimately, if studios don't see some profit from rentals, there may be no product released to buy or rent, and the bright promise of prerecorded cassettes may vanish like a shooting star. Unless a compromise emerges, this could be a duel to the death.

Seth Goldstein is the managing editor of *Video Week* and a senior editor of *Television Digest*.

Continued on page 33

IN A WORLD WHERE IMPORTANT DECISIONS
ARE OFTEN MADE ON LOOKS ALONE...



ISN'T IT GOOD TO KNOW THERE'S
SOMETHING THAT'S LOOKING BETTER ALL THE TIME.

From the excitement of a chase scene to the realism of a human drama, only film has the capability to give you the exact look you want.

Film offers the broadest range of imaging—from delicate hues, subtle detail, and controlled depth, to brilliant color, sharp contrast, and bold perspectives. Eastman color negative films can convincingly portray reality or convey fantasy without losing believability.

For your next production, look into Eastman color films. They'll make you look better, too.



Eastman film. It's looking better all the time.

FILL YOUR HOLIDAYS WITH

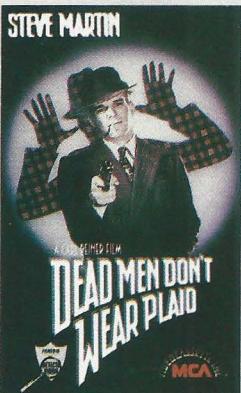
BLOCKBUSTERS

Celebrate the holidays with a brand new lineup of hits from MCA Video. To make the season sparkle, we've put together an assortment of holiday goodies that you won't be able to resist. Like the latest blockbusters from Hollywood. Including laughs, thrills, and a movie with plenty of muscle.

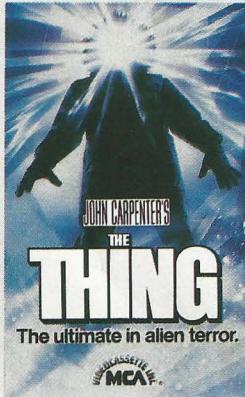
Other blockbusters available include **CAT PEOPLE** and **WOODY WOODPECKER AND HIS FRIENDS**.



Burt and Dolly get their jollies in the musical comedy hit **THE BEST LITTLE WHOREHOUSE IN TEXAS**.



Steve Martin will slay you in his spoof of 1940's murder mysteries called **DEAD MEN DON'T WEAR PLAID**.

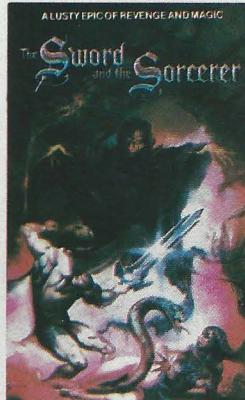


When it comes to horror, John Carpenter's **THE THING** is just the thing.



Arnold Schwarzenegger stars in a giant of a movie, **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**.

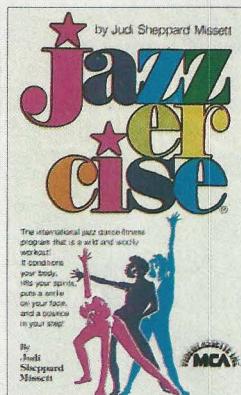
Experience a lusty epic of revenge and magic with **THE SWORD AND THE SORCERER**.



ORIGINAL PROGRAMMING

Now you can trim up while you're trimming your tree with **AEROBIC DANCING** and Judi Sheppard Missett's **JAZZERCISE**, two fast moving exercise tapes that can only be found on MCA Video.

You'll also want to pick up **HOW TO WATCH PRO FOOTBALL**, **THE WORLD OF MARTIAL ARTS** and other original programs.



Hundreds of thousands of students now participate in **JAZZERCISE** with Judi Sheppard Missett.



One of the fastest moving tapes around is **AEROBIC DANCING** with Jacki Sorensen.

TER

MCA VIDEO ENTERTAINMENT

COLLECTOR'S CHOICE

This season, our Collector's Choice series priced at an incredible \$39.95 per cassette delivers everything from Irving Berlin's HOLIDAY INN to Groucho and the gang cooking up their own brand of insanity in DUCK SOUP. So stock up on memories and save a bundle while you're doing it.

Other Collector's Choice titles include TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, THE WIZ and many more.



ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN, in this 1948 blend of thrills and laughs.



The Marx Brothers go to war in DUCK SOUP and the result is one of the funniest movies ever.



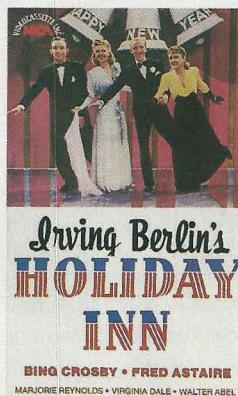
Bela Lugosi makes his debut as the most famous blood-sucker of all time in the 1931 classic, DRACULA.



W.C. Fields and Mae West are out for high stakes and high jinks in the classic romp, MY LITTLE CHICKADEE.



Bing Crosby is at his best in GOING MY WAY, the heartwarming musical that won 7 Academy Awards, including Best Picture.



Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire are playing tonight in the 1942 classic, HOLIDAY INN.

As you can see MCA Video has the kind of well-rounded holiday package that's perfect for gifts or home viewing, including the hot tickets from Hollywood, vintage favorites that never go out of style, and fun and fast paced exercise tapes to help you burn off those holiday calories.

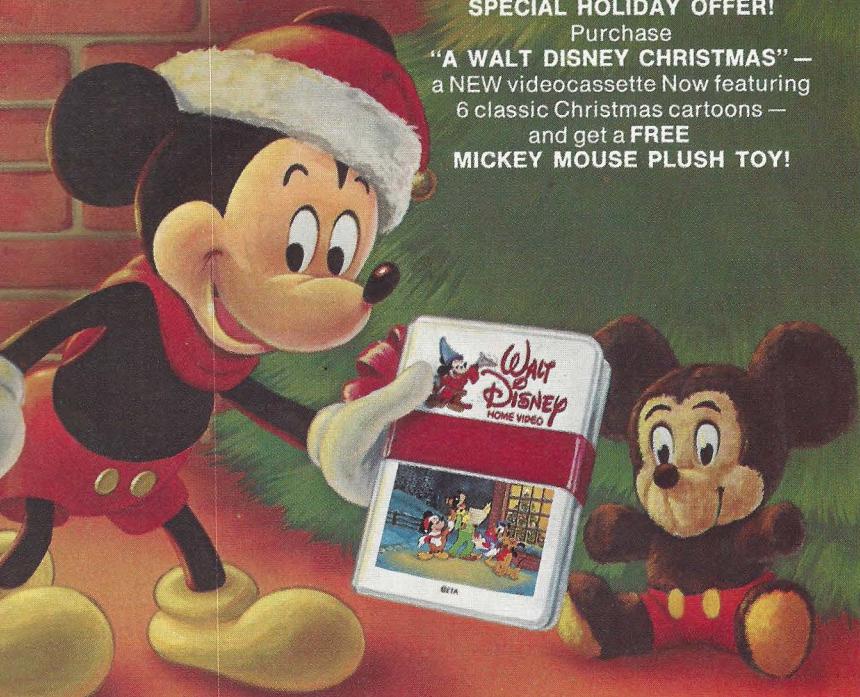
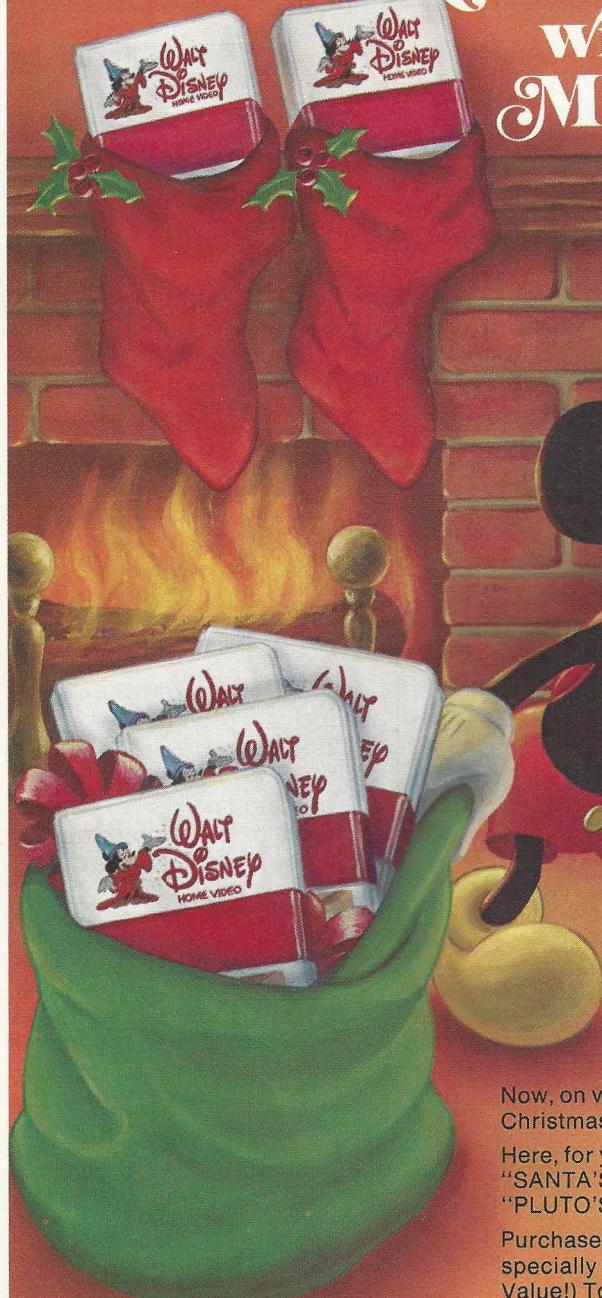
So stop by your nearest video dealer and do your Christmas shopping with MCA Video. And get ready for the best holiday season ever with the best in take-home entertainment.



70 Universal City Plaza
Universal City, CA 91608
© 1982 MCA Videocassette Inc.



T is "A Walt Disney Christmas" and here for your house, is a NEW videocassette with a FREE Mickey Mouse!



SPECIAL HOLIDAY OFFER!

Purchase
"A WALT DISNEY CHRISTMAS" —
a NEW videocassette Now featuring
6 classic Christmas cartoons —
and get a **FREE**
MICKEY MOUSE PLUSH TOY!

Now, on videocassette, treat your family and friends to "A Walt Disney Christmas" — a new holiday title featuring six classic Walt Disney cartoons.

Here, for your lasting enjoyment, are "ONCE UPON A WINTERTIME," "SANTA'S WORKSHOP," "THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS," "PLUTO'S CHRISTMAS TREE," "DONALD'S SNOW FIGHT" and "ON ICE."

Purchase this NEW videocassette now, while supplies last. It comes specially packaged with a **FREE** Mickey Mouse plush toy! (A \$10 Retail Value!) Together they make a great holiday gift idea — one to be shared and enjoyed by the entire family, year after year. So have yourself "A Walt Disney Christmas!" Suggested Retail Price: \$49.95.

For details, visit your nearest authorized Walt Disney Home Video dealer now!

**The magic lives on . . . with over 50 Walt Disney Movies and
Cartoons Now Available on videocassette and videodisc.**

VIDEOFILM

from page 28

MÉLIÈS MÉLANGE

TeleFrance USA, the French cable television programming network, is offering as part of its current season a retrospective of the films of cinema pioneer Georges Méliès. Many of the twenty-nine films included in the series were lost for years, and the TeleFrance airing represents the first major public showing of those recently rediscovered titles.

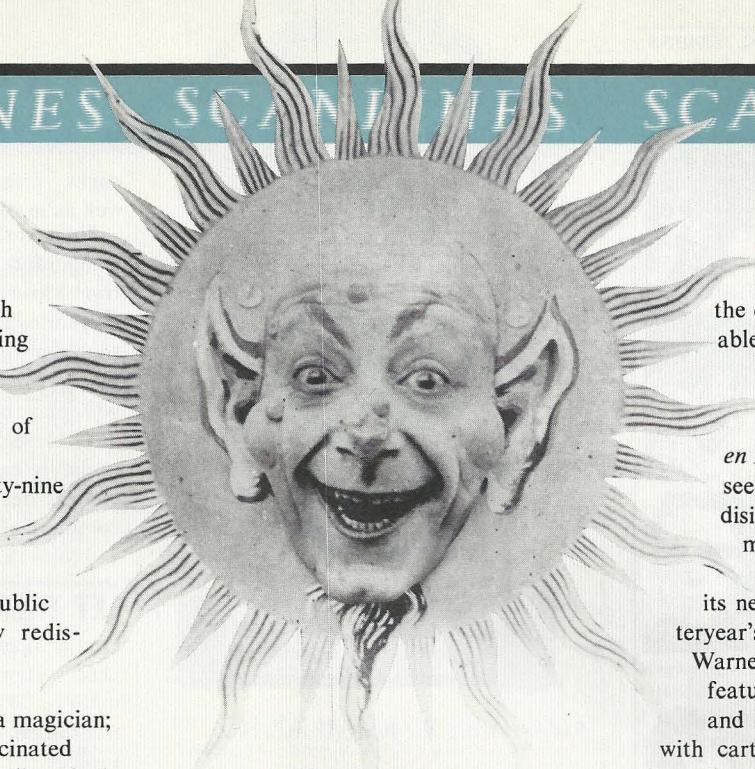
Born in Paris in 1861, Méliès started out in life as a magician; in the 1890s, he became fascinated with the Lumière brothers' "magic lantern," used for theatrical spectacles. He began recording his stage illusions on film, employing techniques developed by the Lumière brothers and creating new ones of his own. In 1897, Méliès built France's first permanent film studio and founded Star Film Company, the first French firm devoted exclusively to making movies. By 1903, the Star Film catalog listed more than five hundred titles, and by the end of his career, Méliès had produced more than seven hundred films.

Méliès's fantastical style was popular for more than a decade, but by 1911 it was beginning to lose out to a more realistic school of filmmaking, and in 1923, he was bankrupt. In a state of disillusionment, he destroyed many of his negatives, sold his prints to a second-hand films dealer, and retired into obscurity. Fortunately, Méliès had sent copies of his negatives to his brother Gaston in the United States. In 1929, René Clair, convinced that Méliès was still alive, launched a search for him that ended in a major retrospective in Paris.

To adapt Méliès's films for television, TeleFrance used a "magnasynch videola," which slows the rapid pace of the original films while retaining a high technical quality. The series began in October and runs through the spring.

NEXT-DAY PUBLICITY

The insatiable demand for material to fill widening television-news time slots prompted Universal vice-president Gordon

From Méliès's *The Impossible Voyage*.

Armstrong to dream up a new way to promote films: electronic press kits. Beginning with the release of *Conan the Barbarian*, Armstrong has been sending out forty-five- to fifty-five-minute videocassettes that include trailers, on-location stories and interviews with directors and actors to 144 broadcast stations and 40 cable systems around the country.

The tapes are divided into short segments that stations can edit into their own reports. Each station receiving the tapes has exclusive use of the material in its market. Kits are currently being prepared for *The Dark Crystal*, *Six Weeks*, and *Frances*, all Christmas releases.

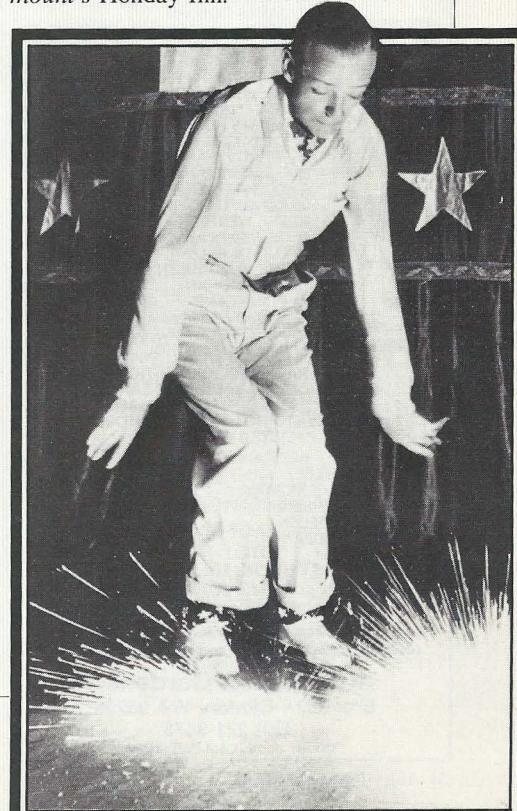
The tapes cost close to \$100,000 to produce, but, according to Armstrong, they're well worth the cost. The *Conan* kit was used by seventy-five percent of the stations receiving it and the *E.T.* kit by eighty-five percent. Universal recently tried to send the kits by the Westar I satellite, but, Armstrong says, the experiment was less than successful. Some local stations, especially in smaller markets, lacked the proper dishes to receive feeds, and even at stations with the right equipment, engineers resisted taking the time to record the transmissions. Universal found that Federal Express delivers the electronic press kits to stations "absolutely, positively overnight," even without space-age technology.

REMEMBRANCE OF FILMS PAST

While film buffs bemoan the dearth of classic movies available on cassette, most video manufacturers ignore nostalgia in favor of recent releases, like *On Golden Pond* and *Star Wars*, that are seen as the paragons of merchandising success. Now at least two major studios are beginning to release classic films. Billing its new series as "the magic of yesteryear's movie palace experience," Warner Home Video is packaging feature films like *The Wrong Man* and *The Prince and the Showgirl* with cartoons, newsreels, and trailers from the mid-fifties. Of the series' five current releases, two, *Auntie Mame* and *Dial M for Murder*, have hit the *Billboard* best-selling video charts, which has encouraged Warners to release more soon.

MCA Video recently launched "Collector's Choice," a series of older movies that will retail at \$39.95 each, significantly lower than the price of contemporary films on cassettes. *Holiday Inn*, *State of the Union*, *Duck Soup*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and the original *Scarface* are among

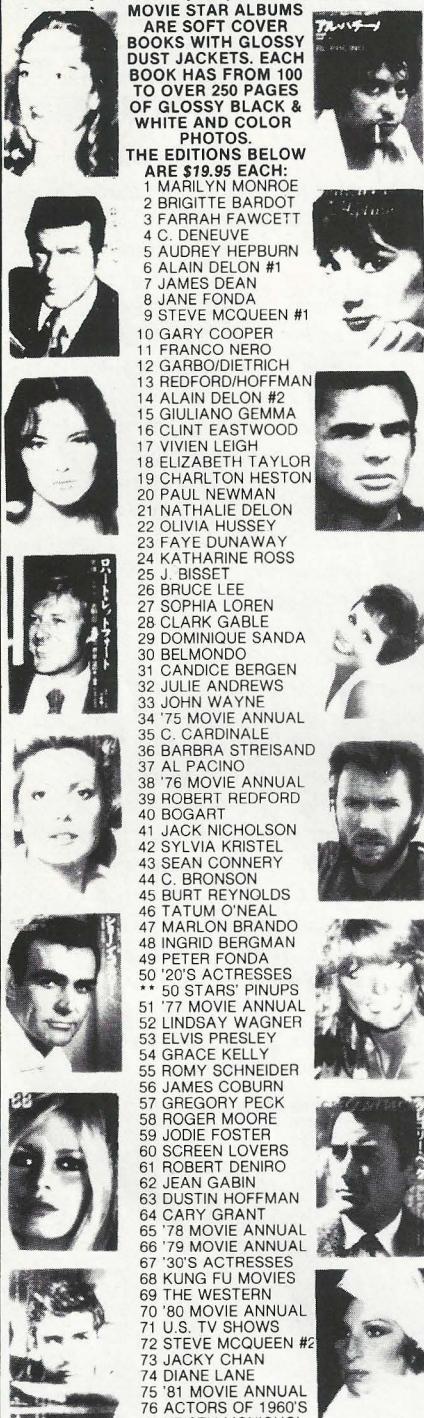
Fred Astaire's talent sparkles in Paramount's *Holiday Inn*.



Japanese Movie Star Photo Albums

Thousands Sold in America!

89 Quality Picture Books
Many Previously Unpublished Photos!



THE SERIES 2 DELUXE EDITIONS
(A-K) PRICED AT \$24.95 ARE LARGE
FORMAT AND CONTAIN ENTIRELY
DIFFERENT PHOTOS FROM THOSE
LISTED ABOVE

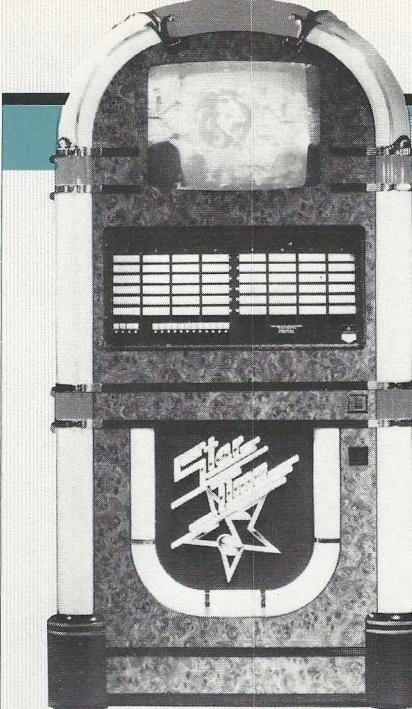
A AUDREY HEPBURN G CHARLIE CHAPLIN
B BRUCE LEE H TRAINS IN FILMS
C MARILYN MONROE I BROOKE SHIELDS
D OLIVIA HUSSEY J CLINT EASTWOOD
E ALAIN DELON K CHERYL LADD
F JAMES DEAN

Postage- \$1 1ST BOOK; 50¢ EACH ADDITIONAL
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Money back if not delighted



Video rescues the jukebox industry.

the titles currently in the collection; it also includes a number of B-movies, such as *Bedtime for Bonzo*, which some film fans (and Republicans) consider a classic in its own right.

HEY, MISTER, THAT'S ME UP ON THE JUKEBOX

In the fifties, virtually every soda shop, diner, and beer joint in the country had a jukebox. But these days, video games and tape-recorded music have replaced the old Seeburgs and Rockolas. To the rescue of a dying industry comes Jack Millman, whose video jukeboxes may combine the best of the old and the new.

A former jazz trumpeter, Millman now distributes Startime Video Muzikboxx, a combination jukebox and video console. The machine is equipped with dozens of video clips provided by record companies in exchange for royalties. By dropping fifty cents into the coin slot, music lovers can enjoy their favorite bands' performances in color and in stereo.

Although only a handful of boxes have been sold in the United States, Millman says he has sold a thousand of them in Britain. His company, Video Music International, has also signed distribution agreements in Sweden and the Philippines and expects to close deals soon in Nigeria, Mexico, South Africa, and Spain.

Millman sees a variety of uses for the video jukebox: in dentists' offices, playing oral hygiene tapes; in factory cafeterias, offering job-safety tips; in amusement

SCANLINES

parks, with children's programming; as well as in bars and restaurants.

By next summer, Millman hopes to have a thousand boxes placed around the country. "Move over, Pac-Man," he boasts. The only drawback to the video jukebox as a source of entertainment seems to be Millman's plan to program advertisements that will play continuously until a customer pays to see a selection. This feature will probably earn Millman lots of change as viewers desperately try to drown out the commercial jingles.

LET THERE BE DISCS

God is alive and well on the RCA Video-Disc system. RCA has licensed five volumes of "The New Media Bible," a video translation of the Bible by the Genesis Project.

Under the supervision of movie producer John Heyman, Genesis set out seven years ago to film the Scriptures from beginning to end. By last January, Heyman had already spent \$20 million shooting on location in the Middle East; he expects to spend as much as \$200 million by 1995, when work should be completed.

The five RCA feature-length discs—including such immortal tales as those of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Noah and the Ark—will be priced at under twenty-five dollars each. According to Seth Willenson, RCA VideoDisc vice-president, "We are bringing spiritual values into the home in a historical, realistic, and entertaining way that appeals to all members of the family. These videodiscs highlight the new medium's ability to tailor programs for specific audiences—programs that can be seen at any hour of the day." Regrettably, RCA won't release the five Bible discs until early next year, too late to add to this year's Christmas shopping lists. ■

Biblicals are back—on RCA discs.



Videography

A guide to motion picture features mentioned in this issue that are available on videocassette or videodisc. (C) denotes Beta/VHS cassette distributor . . . (L) Laservision optical disc . . . (S) SelectaVision CED disc. For further information, refer to the Distributor Directory.*

NEWSREEL

The Endless Summer (Cinema 5), 1966, 90 min., color. Pacific Arts Video Records (C).
Poltergeist (MGM/UA), 1982, 115 min., color. MGM/UA (C).

DIALOGUE ON FILM: DYAN CANNON

The Anderson Tapes (Columbia), 1971, 98 min., color. Columbia (C).
Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice (Columbia), 1969, 106 min., color. Columbia (C).
Deathtrap (Warner Bros.), 1982, 116 min., color. Columbia (C).
Heaven Can Wait (Paramount), 1978, 100 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).
Honeysuckle Rose (Warner Bros.), 1980, 119 min., color. Warner (C).

VIDEO BOOM BUSTS RETAILERS

Adam's Rib (MGM), 1949, 101 min., B/W. MGM/UA (C).
Arthur (Orion), 1981, 97 min., color. Warner (C).
Bye-Bye Brazil (Carnaval/Unifilm), 1980, 100 min., color. Warner (C).
Chariots of Fire (Warner Bros.), 1981, 124 min., color. Warner (C).
Shoot the Moon (MGM/UA), 1982, 124 min., color. MGM/UA (C).
Star Wars (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1977, 121 min., color. CBS/Fox (C); RCA (S).
Superman II (Warner Bros.), 1981, 127 min., color. Warner (C).

SCANLINES

Auntie Mame (Warner Bros.), 1958, 143 min., color. Warner (C).
Bedtime for Bonzo (Universal Pictures), 1951, 83 min., B/W. MCA (C).
Conan (Universal), 1982, 115 min., color. MCA (C).
Dial M for Murder (Warner Bros.), 1954, 105 min., color. Warner (C).
Duck Soup (Paramount), 1933, 72 min., B/W. MCA (C).
Holiday Inn (Paramount) 1942, 101 min., B/W. MCA (C).
On Golden Pond (Universal/ITC), 1981, 109 min., color. CBS/Fox (C).
The Prince and the Showgirl (Warner Bros.), 1957, 115 min., color. Warner (C).
Scarface (United Artists), 1932, 94 min., B/W. MCA (C).
Star Wars (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1977, 121 min., color. CBS/Fox (C); RCA (S).
State of the Union (MGM), 1948, 124 min., B/W. MCA (C).

The Thing (RKO), 1951, 80 min., B/W. Nostalgia Merchant, King of Video (C); RCA (S).
To Kill a Mockingbird (Universal), 1962, 129 min., B/W. MCA (C).

HOW SWEET IT WAS

Citizen Kane (RKO), 1941, 120 min., color. Nostalgia Merchant, King of Video, RCA (S).
Easy Rider (Columbia), 1969, 88 min., color. Columbia (C); RCA (S).

Inside Moves (Associated Film Distribution), 1980, 113 min., color. CBS/Fox (C).
Smokey and the Bandit (Universal), 1977, 96 min., color. MCA (C).

Superman (Warner Bros.), 1978, 128 min., color. Warner (C).
The Wild Bunch (Warner Bros.), 1969, 127 min., color. Warner (C).

PRAIRIE FILM COMPANION

Apocalypse Now (United Artists), 1979, 139 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).
Badlands (Warner Bros.), 1974, 95 min., color. Warner (C).
Wolfen (Orion), 1981, 115 min., color. Warner (C).

HISTORY OF THE (FILM) WORLD, PART II

Breathless (Films Around the World), 1960, 89 min., B/W. Festival Films (C).
Citizen Kane (RKO), 1941, 120 min., B/W. Nostalgia Merchant, King of Video (C); RCA (S).
How to Marry a Millionaire (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1953, 96 min., color. CBS/Fox (C).
The Robe (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1953, 133 min., color. CBS/Fox (C).

MARTY

Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More (Warner Bros.), 113 min., color. Warner.
History of the World, Part 1 (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1981, 90 min., color. CBS/Fox (C); RCA (S).
The Last Waltz (United Artists), 1978, 117 min., color. RCA (S).
The Man Who Fell to Earth (Cinema 5), 1976, 118 min., color. Columbia (C).
Poltergeist (MGM/UA), 1982, 114 min., color. MGM/UA (C).
Rabid (New World Pictures), 1977, 90 min., color. Warner (C).
Raging Bull (United Artists), 1980, 128 min., B/W. CBS/Fox (C); RCA (S).
The Red Shoes (Eagle Lion), 1948, 133 min., color. RCA (S).
Scanners (Embassy), 1981, 102 min., color. CBS/Fox (C).
Stardust Memories (United Artists), 1980, 89 min., color. CBS/Fox (C).
Street Scene (United Artists), 1931, 80 min., B/W. Budget Video, Cable Films, Video Connection (C).
Taxi Driver (Columbia), 1976, 113 min., color. Columbia (C).
West Side Story (United Artists), 1961, 151 min., color. CBS/Fox (C).

BOOKS

The Damned (Warner Bros.), 1969, 150 min., color. Warner (C).

TRAILERS

Animal House (Universal), 1978, 109 min., color. MCA (C).

Dressed to Kill (Filmways), 1980, 105 min., color. Warner (C); RCA (S).

The Four Seasons (Universal), 1981, 107 min., color. MCA (C).

The Late Show (Warner Bros.), 1977, 94 min., color. Warner (C).

North Dallas Forty (Paramount), 1979, 117 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).

The Pursuit of D.B. Cooper (Universal), 1981, 100 min., color. MCA (C).

Rocky (United Artists), 1976, 119 min., color. CBS/Fox (C); RCA (S).

Up in Smoke (Paramount), 1979, 97 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).

Distributor Directory

Budget Video, Inc. 1534 N. Highland Avenue, Hollywood, CA 90028, (213) 466-2431.

Cable Films Country Club Station Box 7171, Kansas City, MO 64113, (913) 362-2804.

Capital Home Video Corporation, 12812 Garden Grove Blvd., Suite B, Garden Grove, CA 92643, (714) 534-0501, (800) 854-7119

CBS/Fox Video 23434 Industrial Park Court, Farmington Hills, MI 48024, (313) 477-6066.

Columbia Pictures Home Entertainment 2901 W. Alameda Ave., Burbank, CA 91505, (213) 954-4950.

Festival Films 2841 Irving Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55408, (612) 870-4744.

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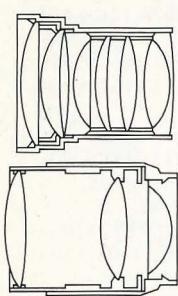
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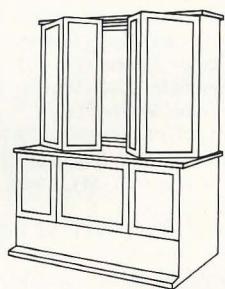
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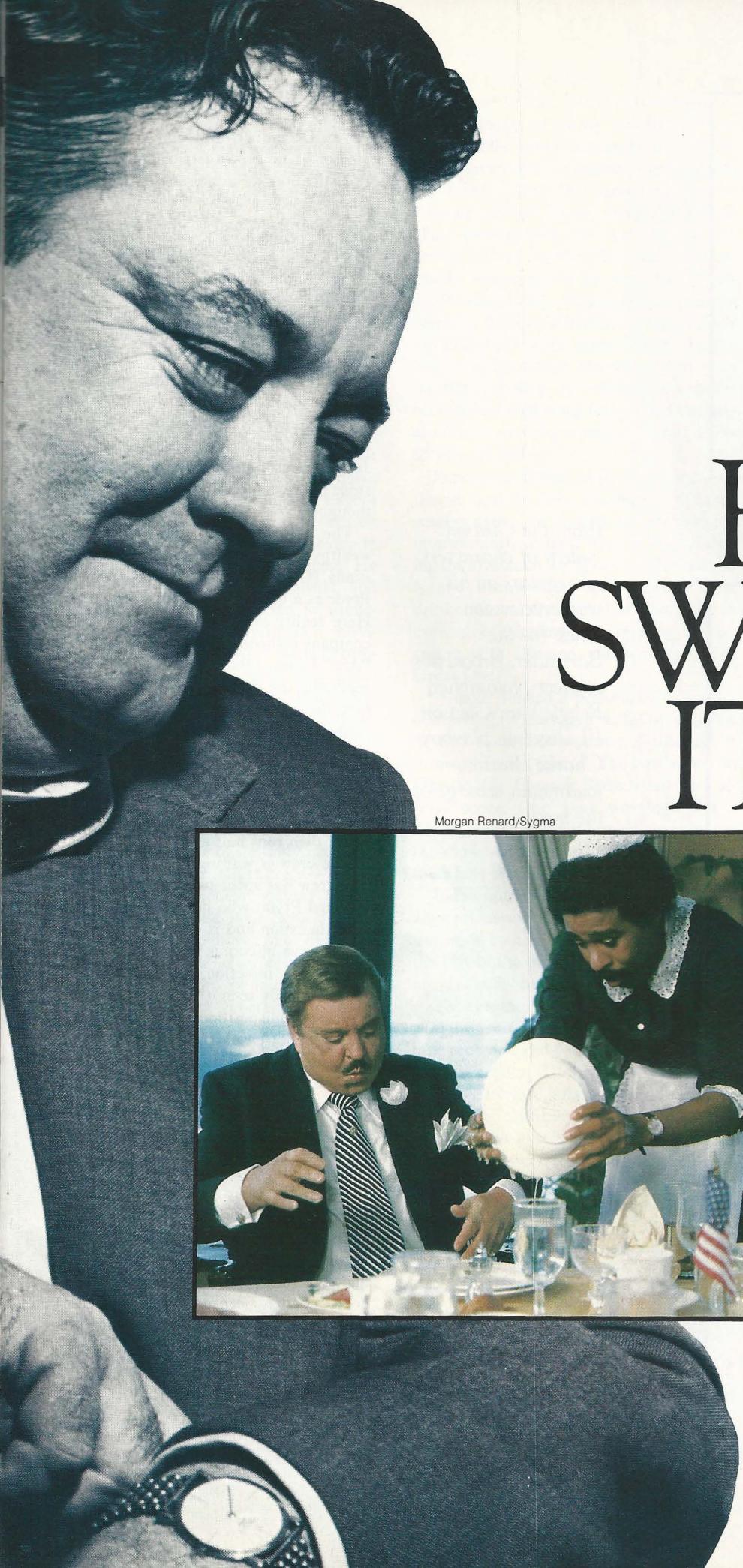
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HOW SWEET IT WAS

Morgan Renard/Sygma



In the golden age of television, no one had the Midas touch like Jackie Gleason. Now he's working harder than ever in movies, but the thrill is gone.

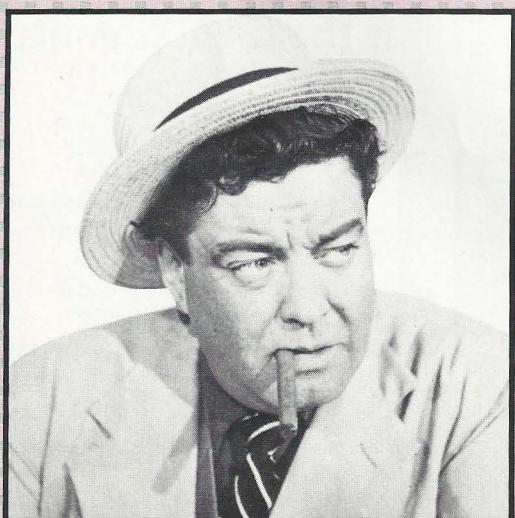
Toby Thompson

Jackie Gleason looks beautiful. He's seated in a tall director's chair with "The Great One" written across its back. He's draped in a maroon dressing gown, and his tiny dancer's feet shine in brightly polished slippers. A cigarette dangles from his left hand. He stares straight ahead. Presently his energy will fill the set as he improvises a scene

Gleason then—at a fifties recording session—and now—in his new film, The Toy, with Richard Pryor.



From the Gleason gallery of characters, all regulars on his weekly television series: Joe the Bartender, Brooklyn's resident philosopher; Reggie Van Gleason III, dissolute playboy; Charlie Bratton, loudmouth scourge of the meek.



with Richard Pryor in this, their new movie, *The Toy*, to be released by Columbia in December. But for the moment Gleason is quiet, an island of New York sophistication in a morass of California yahoos.

If character had a theme song, the strains of "Melancholy Serenade" would light Gleason like a Manhattan dawn. His mustache is perfectly trimmed, his hair tinted blond for the part. Smoke curls about it. He is tan and, for Gleason, moderately thin. He motions impatiently to his valet for another cigarette. As usual, Gleason is furious about waiting. Unlike his halcyon years in television, he has little control of his time on the movie set. And Jackie Gleason needs control. So he sits, a stone figure, aloof, brooding, alone with his thoughts.

The setting is the game room of a wealthy businessman in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (Gleason plays the tycoon, who buys Pryor as a toy for his eleven-year-old son.) Here reality and fantasy overlap, for the company is shooting in the mansion of A.C. "Ace" Lewis, a Baton Rouge entrepreneur, reputedly the richest man in Louisiana. In fact, the set is Lewis's game room—temporarily garnished with big-game heads, a stuffed lion, and a pool table. But here Jackie Gleason is padrone. Exercising his prerogative, he rises nimbly from his chair, performs several trick shots on the pool table, then runs half a rack.

The crew is waiting for Richard Pryor. The crew has spent two weeks waiting for Richard Pryor, who has been hospitalized for exhaustion and is currently indisposed with an eye infection.

"An eye infection," Gleason mutters. "Has anybody seen it?"

Pryor's indisposition has been the butt of Gleason's sarcasm the past few days—Gleason, who, despite his sixty-six years, triple-bypass heart surgery, and a partially incapacitated leg, arm, and eye, has not missed a day on the set. Pryor is here this morning, and the company is eager to see the old and new masters mix.

Gleason picks up a shotgun he is to use in the scene. He works its breech. Director Richard Donner (*Inside Moves*, *Superman*) walks him through the action once and calls for Pryor. There is the sound of a door opening. Gleason whirls, shotgun in hand. Pryor slithers along the wall, mugging heavily in mock terror.

"You saved my life," Gleason says. "I guess I owe you one."

"You owe me one?" Pryor says. "I owe you one," and on like that, in dialogue meaningless outside the context of the

script, yet strangely significant. For both comedians do owe each other: Pryor for Gleason's mythic example, Gleason for the chance to work in a high-budget film with today's hottest star. Trading barbs with Richard Pryor will do Jackie Gleason's pocketbook no harm.

The two perform brilliantly together. There are shades of Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Gleason and Carney. As the scene finishes, the set erupts in laughter and director Donner turns, exclaiming, "Now *that's* comedy."

Gleason strides toward his trailer.

That's comedy, but these days nothing seems terribly funny to Jackie Gleason. It's not that he's depressed; he's just down with a bad case of having seen it all. Except for a six-year hiatus in the seventies, Gleason has since 1931 worked nonstop in nearly every branch of show business. He has emceed talent shows, carnivals, and nightclubs; danced; performed in vaudeville, burlesque, Broadway theater, television comedy, and television drama; composed and conducted music; and, since 1941, acted in a succession of Hollywood films—sometimes two or three a year. Jackie Gleason is, well, *tired* of working. But there is something in his personality that won't let him quit. At least, not on the crest of a new wave of popularity.

Fifties and sixties audiences remember Gleason best for his blisteringly eccentric cast of television characters—Ralph Kramden of "The Honeymooners," Reggie Van Gleason III, the Poor Soul, Joe the Bartender—and for movie roles like Minnesota Fats in *The Hustler* and Maish Rennick in *Requiem for a Heavyweight*. But to an emerging generation he is instantly recognizable as Sheriff Buford T. Justice from the phenomenally successful *Burt Reynolds Smokey and the Bandit* vehicles.

"Everybody had done a southern, redneck sheriff," Gleason says, "and it bothered me, when I read *Smokey*, that I couldn't think of how to do it different. Then I got the idea of the pencil mustache; then I got that accent. And I wrote every line I did, in both *Smokeys*."

When Gleason wraps *The Toy*, he will begin shooting *Smokey III*. Counting *The Sting II*, to be released in February, it will be the third picture he has made this year. "After this *Smokey*, no more comedies," Gleason mutters. "I've got some dramatic projects I'd like to do—but maybe not even them."

For someone so impatient with movies,

Gleason spends enough time working at them! And he surrounds himself with the accoutrements of movie stardom: a two-million-dollar house in Lauderhill, Florida, a lavish wardrobe, a personal valet. Back in his trailer, after the game-room scene, Gleason perches in yet another director's chair, flicking ashes all over the rug and crying, "Mel!" to Mel Pape, his functionary for many years; he demands Pape's assistance in the slightest task. Gleason seems to feed on the man's presence. He's anxious about being alone. When Gleason was nine, his father abandoned him. His mother died when he was sixteen; an older brother had died when he was two. As long as Gleason can pay a man to remain in his service, he will.

Pape serves drinks, adjusts the air conditioner, and fetches cigarettes. Gleason smokes five or six packs a day. He may nip intermittently at light beer or Scotch during the afternoon. By his own admission, he is and always has been a world-class drinker. It was Orson Welles who, after an evening of tippling and reciting Shakespeare with Gleason, dubbed him "The Great One."

"I never missed a performance because of drinking," Gleason says. "I take only one or two when I'm working. Otherwise it throws off your timing. The coffee cup on 'The Jackie Gleason Show,' that was always booze. One week we threw out a 'Honeymooners' script several hours before the show, started drinking, and improvised the whole skit. But that was rare."

Today, author James Bacon and Marilyn Taylor, Gleason's third wife, are on the set. Bacon, a contemporary of Gleason's and the last of the old-time Hollywood columnists, is collaborating with Gleason on the star's autobiography. Their method of working is to pour the Scotch, turn on the tape recorder, and swap stories until one or the other quits. The stories are hilarious. They are by turn inflammatory, licentious, and crude, and they involve everyone of whom you've ever heard.

With only one reaction shot left this afternoon, Gleason is not holding back on the Scotch. He drinks it straight and without ice. Still, he seems morose about breaking training. Other days, he's confined himself to diet soda. "It's the boredom," he says to no one in particular. "That's the terrible thing about making pictures. You work two minutes, then wait for an hour. It's a pain in the ass. You pray for a long scene."

Boredom wasn't always a problem. During television's golden age, when Jackie Gleason was Mr. Saturday Night and had

an eleven-million-dollar contract with CBS, he was producing two "Honeymooners" a week and was always hopping. "We used to do an hour show, before a live audience, in an hour and fifteen minutes. The fifteen minutes was for set changes. In all those years, we only stopped the show once, when the backdrop collapsed, and we had to. I broke my leg onstage, and Carney went out to close the show. Fortunately, it was right near the end. I used to make mistakes, then come out and tell the audience—but never from within the scene. We did 'The Honeymooners' in a theater, like a play. That was the first live sit-com; Skelton came afterwards, and so did Lucy."

"It's the boredom. That's the terrible thing about making pictures. You work two minutes, then wait an hour. It's a pain in the ass. You pray for a long scene."

Would Gleason consider a return to television? "Every year they want me to come back and do a variety show. Too tough. You can't get the writing. And the writers got it easy now. All they have to do is show a broad's ass wiggling. Or give an inference that somebody's pregnant. The *easy* kind of writing. Nobody would want to try and write the stuff that I would do. 'Cause we had to have real scenes."

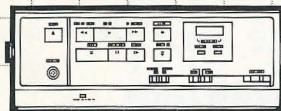
There is a knock at the trailer door. "Ten minutes," a script girl says.

"Ten minutes," Gleason laughs. "Ten minutes means forty-five." He calls for another drink.

The contradictions of Jackie Gleason's personality are the contradictions that have endeared him to the public as a star: an affection for lavishness juxtaposed with a propensity to blue-collar crudity; a skill at broad physical comedy combined with an indulgence in pathos and an ability to play tough dramatic scenes; a soft spot for romance, "lush strings and gorgeous

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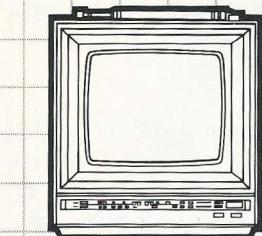
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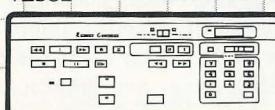
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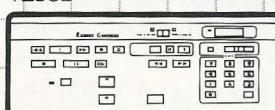
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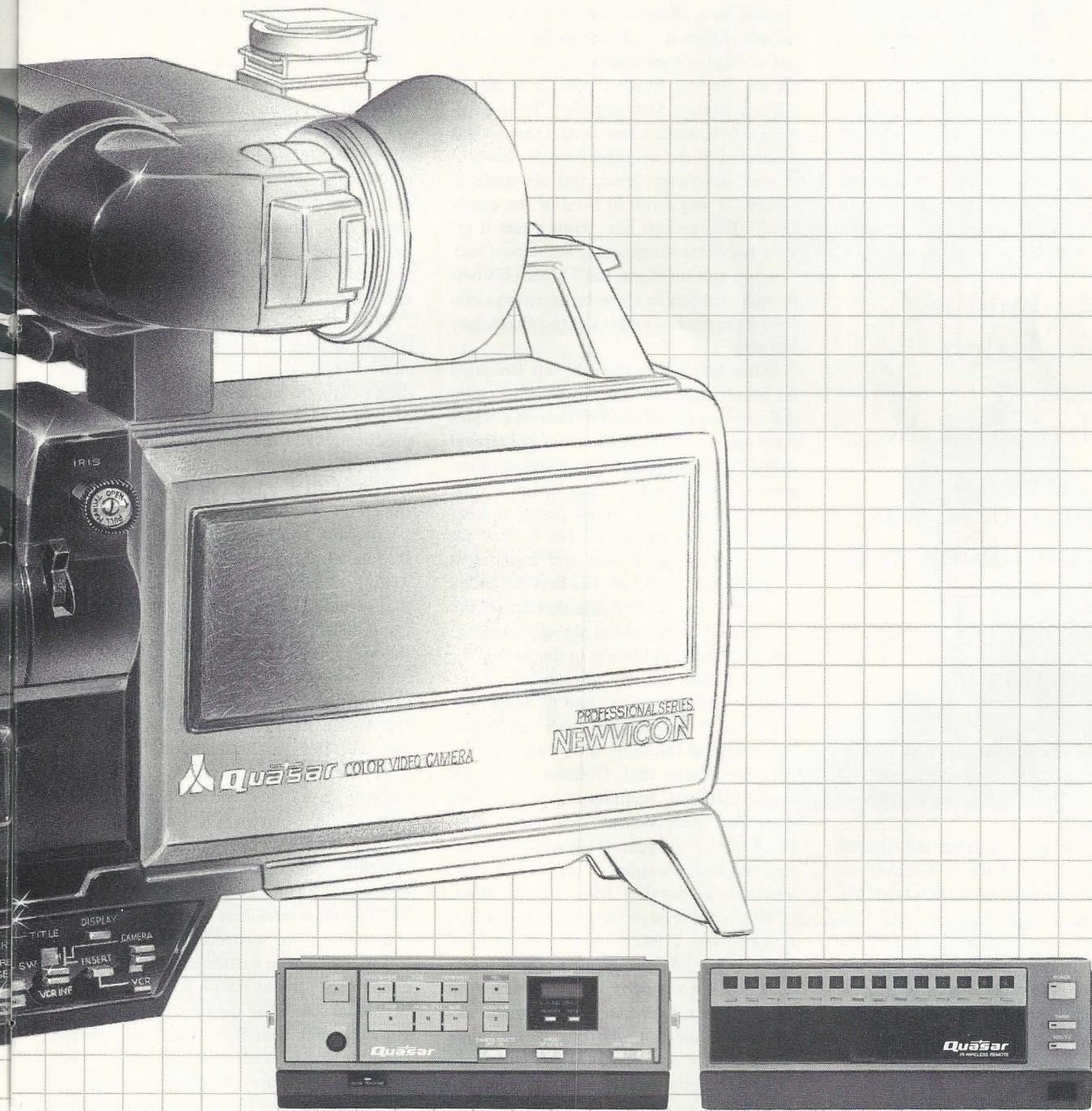


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dames," undercut by an intense loyalty to theatrical realism. It is theatrical realism that may be Gleason's principal contribution to television. In an era when television comedy was "all jokes—joke, joke, joke," Gleason personally created a cast of characters that he presented dramatically, and that he delineated as fiercely as any in the medium's history. Most were from his past, and many reflected parts of the Gleason personality.

"I knew a hundred guys like Ralph Kramden in Brooklyn," Gleason affirms. "And there were seven or eight Nortons on every block. Pop Dennehay, from 'Joe the Bartender,' lived downstairs from us when

"I knew a hundred guys like Ralph Kramden in Brooklyn. And the set for 'The Honeymooners' was exactly our living and dining room—we had a different stove, but that was it."

I was a kid. And the set for 'The Honeymooners' was *exactly* our living and dining room—we had a different kind of stove, but that was it."

John O'Hara, in complimenting Gleason as an artist, compared Ralph Kramden to "a character we might be getting from Mr. Dickens if he were writing for TV." Certainly "The Honeymooners" set, and the way it vaulted Jackie Gleason from childhood destitution to adult stardom, is Dickensian. It was in that room that Gleason's parents argued, like Ralph and Alice Kramden. And it was to that room that Gleason's father returned, the last night Gleason saw him, to destroy every family photograph in which he appeared.

His father's disappearance was a pivotal moment in Gleason's life. The elder Gleason, a clerk for an insurance company, was a drinker who would occasionally vanish for entire weekends on binges. But he did introduce his son to Saturday vaudeville shows. The first time Gleason realized he wanted to be an actor he was a six-year-old seated in his father's lap "at a movie and a

five-act vaudeville show at the Halsey Theater. During the stage show I turned around, like the comedians, and faced the audience. I saw all the people laughing and I knew that life was for me."

After his father left, Gleason's mother worked as a changemaker in the subway. Gleason finished grade school but dropped out of high school. From the time he was eleven, he had hustled pool in Brooklyn billiard parlors and gambled; he was always able to make a few cents. Gleason was venerated in the neighborhood for his skill at pool, his fancy dress, and his sense of humor. "I was a riot in front of the candy store." Expressions like "How sweet it is" grew out of his shenanigans in the pool hall. "I was a riot up there, too." Gleason's first professional job in show business was emceeing the amateur shows at the old Halsey Theater.

When his mother died, he left Brooklyn for Manhattan. He took any work he could get. He was an exhibition diver in a water show and an emcee for a traveling carnival called "B. Ward Beam's International Congress of Daredevils." "That was a terrible life. All you did was drink booze and eat eggs with ants in them." He worked for three years as an emcee and bouncer at Newark's Club Miami. His first big break was a two-year run at Manhattan's Club 18, on West Fifty-second Street. "That was one of the best nightclubs in the world," he recalls. "You couldn't do an act there. Couldn't tell jokes. You had to ad-lib. Every night it was packed with celebrities. We never did the same show twice."

It was there that Gleason honed his improvisational techniques, and it was there that Jack Warner saw him and offered him a one-year Hollywood contract that resulted in a string of bit parts in some less-than-memorable films: *Navy Blues* (1941), *All Through the Night* (1942), and *Larceny, Inc.* (1942). For Twentieth Century-Fox he did *Springtime in the Rockies* (1942) and *Orchestra Wives* (1942), with Glenn Miller. Gleason, it is claimed, was the only comedian who could ever make Miller laugh. And it was in Miller's band that Gleason met musician Bobby Hackett, with whom he would later initiate a series of some forty albums of romantic music, featuring the Jackie Gleason Orchestra.

Although making movies had been a lifelong ambition for Gleason, live theater and nightclubs remained his first loves. During the forties, Gleason appeared in a number of Broadway shows, including *Keep Off the Grass* and *Follow the Girls*, and continued to work in clubs, most notably Slapsie Maxie's in Los Angeles, "the second-best

nightclub in the world." It was from Slapsie Maxie's that Gleason was hired in 1950 for "a two-week engagement" as host of DuMont Television Network's "Cavalcade of Stars," an engagement that stretched to two years and was the springboard for his extraordinary career in live television.

Before DuMont hired him, he had worked for twenty-six weeks during the 1949-50 season as Chester A. Riley in the first television version of "The Life of Riley." But that NBC show was filmed and was not the best format for Gleason's talents. "Cavalcade" was live, it was variety, and it was a showcase for all that Gleason had learned in nightclubs and burlesque. He demanded total control of the show, and got it.

Why take the risk of demanding total control at such an early stage in his television career? Because, Gleason says, he didn't care. "I was anxious to get back to Slapsie's, where all the fun was. I told the producer, 'You've only got me for two weeks. If I'm going to flop, I'll flop my own way. And if I'm a hit, I'm going to take all the credit.'"

Gleason composed his theme music ("Melancholy Serenade"), approved the writing, and began to create the characters that would make him famous: Charley the Loudmouth, Rudy the Repairman, Pedro the Mexican, Stanley R. Sogg, Reggie, and many others. With the exception of Reggie, most were blue-collar predecessors to the Archie Bunkers and Fred Sanfords of the seventies—and anomalous on television. "I knew I had to create characters," Gleason says, "because no personality is rich enough to last an hour—and because I always hated to tell jokes." Gleason's sketches worked, and his two weeks were extended. But it was not until the creation of "The Honeymooners" that his future in the medium was secured.

Much has been written about "The Honeymooners": about Ralph Kramden as the perpetual loser, the quixotic dreamer, the get-rich-quick schemer; about the sympathetic magic between the three principals, Art Carney, Audrey Meadows, and Gleason. But not much has been said about the show's tone. Overall, it was one of anxiety. Like contemporary television, "The Honeymooners" was structured around tension: the tension of a household in disarray. The Kramdens argued incessantly, and though the ending was always happy—Ralph holding Alice in his arms, crooning, "Baby, you're the greatest"—there were constant threats of violence and desertion. "How would you like a knuckle sandwich?" or

"Pack your bags, Alice!" or "You're going to the moon, Alice—bang, zoom, smash—right to the moon!" The audiences sat wedded to this action, and of course laughed. ("It's not violence when it gets laughs," Gleason has said.) The Kramdens' problems infected a generation, just as Gleason's instinct for situation comedy most certainly influenced television through the years.

"Carroll O'Connor, when he was doing 'All in the Family,' wrote me a letter," Gleason states. "It said, 'I know I'm doing all the things that you did.' I sent him a letter back and said, 'I wish I had done some of the things you're doing.'"

In 1952, Gleason left DuMont for CBS and "The Jackie Gleason Show." Again he got total control over production. He took with him the June Taylor Dancers (Marilyn Taylor is June's sister) and the cast of "The Honeymooners," plus as many extra beautiful women as he could squeeze into an hour. Gleason's shows, right through the late sixties, were some of the sexiest on television. It wasn't just the chorus girls kicking, but Gleason's "Glea-Girls," who, to suggestive music, cooed, "And away we go!"

"Sexy, yes," Gleason admits, "but always in good taste. It was a hell of a lot better having some gorgeous broad announce me than Jack Lescoulie."

In 1955, Gleason deeded the variety portion of his show to Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey—"though I maintained control of production"—and concentrated on "The Honeymooners." For the next year, he filmed thirty-nine episodes—then quit, claiming the quality of the material could not be kept up. "CBS wouldn't believe I'd walk out on an eleven-million-dollar contract," Gleason says. But walk he did, taking a year off to compose music and consider the future.

Gleason continued in television, in various comedy formats, throughout the sixties (with "The Honeymooners" an intermittent feature), but began looking more toward Hollywood. "Any comedian who is a decent comedian is a good actor," Gleason said at the time, and set about to prove it. He won acclaim for his dramatic role in a 1958 television production of *The Time of Your Life*. He then returned to Broadway in *Take Me Along*, the musical version of O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!*, and won the Tony Award as outstanding actor in a musical. In 1961 he appeared in *The Hustler* as Minnesota Fats, a role that earned him an Academy Award nomination and with

Continued on page 88

More from the Gleason gallery:
Maish Rennick, the frustrated fight manager of Requiem for a Heavyweight; the mute, simpleminded Parisian janitor of Gigot; and, last but hardly least, television's Everyman, Ralph Kramden, the bus driver who dreams big and thinks little.



PRAIRIE FILM COMPANION

You can't see Hollywood from Minnesota, but local filmmakers don't care. They're less concerned with making deals than making films about their own state.

Phil Anderson

Minnesota? Lakes, ice hockey, Vikings, snow, heat, flour, mosquitoes. Bob Dylan, Judy Garland, Charles A. Lindbergh, F. Scott Fitzgerald.

And independent filmmakers—although some Americans aren't yet prepared to believe it. Screenwriter Gary Jenneke of St. Paul once talked to a prospective agent (she'd called collect from Los Angeles) who consistently referred to the farmers in his script as "peasants." Documentary filmmaker Jim Gambone of Minneapolis once met a woman in Boston who inquired if one could see the Pacific Ocean from Minnesota.

Despite these and other tales of bicoastal ignorance, Minnesota filmmakers have become a more active and more visible community in recent years. The reasons have a lot to do with plain old personal ambition. Not entirely willing to give up the comforts of home for the uncertainties of some big-



Minnesota filmmakers on location for *Finders, Keepers*, a comedy about a hapless farmer suddenly made a local hero.

ger (if not better) place, they have simply gone ahead with their work. They have found that, after all, you can get there by staying here.

Minnesota-made films aren't at all homogenous, and even if relations between Minnesota filmmakers are cordial, there's considerable disagreement over what their movies should do and look like. Some are eager to emulate the Hollywood look; others are just as eager to avoid it. Loose categories do present themselves. There are the narrative features. There are the documentaries, sadly small in number but strong in quality. There are the shorter avant-garde or "personal" films, many of which will be touring the country this month in a special package.

Support for the arts in general has always been strong in Minneapolis and St. Paul, where the public-private mix of corporate, foundation, and government funding favored by the administration has long

been practiced. The area is blessed with renowned orchestras and art museums, and much theater activity (nine Equity stages, including the Tyrone Guthrie repertory; more than forty-five theaters overall). The philanthropic organizations donate more money per capita than those in most U.S. cities.

But film did not always benefit from this largesse. Until recently, few schools included it in their curricula, few institutions treated it as an art, and few investors or foundations dared to fund productions or filmmakers. Consequently, filmmakers were not encouraged to assert themselves. The Twin Cities have been home to a film community of sorts for years, but it suffered from malnutrition and lack of attention.

But now Minnesota filmmaking is showing signs of special care and feeding. The Twin Cities have become the center of a blossoming industrial-film and commer-



© Michael Daniel 1982

*Major star, miner story: Lisa Eichhorn, center, came to Northern Minnesota's iron ore range to make *Wildrose*, an entry next year at Cannes.*



Laurel Cazin

cial business (the metropolitan area is one of the nation's top ten for the production of these types of films), and the filmmakers are lending their talents to independent productions. Foundations and investors seem more sympathetic to film, and the filmmakers themselves have become more creative in the fine art of raising money. The picture looks bright.

Why did Minnesota filmmakers persist in the face of indifference, both local and national? One easy answer is that, winter excepted, it was easier to start in their own backyard, and the backyard was one worth staying in. But there are more complicated reasons. Sandra Schulberg, who has produced a new film called *Wildrose* about the people of Northern Minnesota's Iron Range, was attracted to the indigenous culture of that area: "There's a tremendous ethnic heritage hanging on—Finns and Slovenes, for example, who still speak or understand their grandparents' language.

And there's a good relationship between old and young. We knew there had to be a story up here."

"We" includes John Hanson, who wrote and directed the film, and co-directed *Northern Lights* (made in North Dakota). He and Schulberg shot *Wildrose* in Eveleth, Minnesota, a small town sixty miles north of Duluth. Hanson and Schulberg moved to the area three years ago, got acquainted with the residents, and eventually wrote a story based in the open-pit iron ore mines. The film stars Lisa Eichhorn (*Cutter's Way*, *Yanks*) as a young miner coming of age amid economic hardship. Eichhorn, a fan of *Northern Lights*, agreed to do the film because she was taken with the unusual story and unique setting of *Wildrose*. The film will premiere at next

but one of them from the area. We had a SAG cast and a nonunion crew, and people in L.A. can't believe we shot the film for under a million." Earlier this year, *The Personals* won the Best First Feature award at the Houston International Film Festival. And after talking with several major distributors, Markle made a distribution deal with New World Pictures, which is releasing the film this fall.

Markle came to his polished romantic comedy through the usual arduous dues-paying route of making industrial films and commercials. Directing features, however, was never far from his mind. To prepare for his next film, he and producing partner Patrick Wells have moved to Los Angeles, but they're maintaining an office in Minneapolis. In dealing with Hollywood, they

have discovered the "negativism of the 612 area code," but they are determined to make a feature set in Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area on the Canadian border.

Chuck Statler, an early master of the rock promo short (he directed the early and influential Devo films), values the "mystique" he maintains by not living in New York or Los Angeles. Statler is now planning a feature that he describes as "a real pop film, like the great fifties rock films," and even though he has shot rock group tours all over the world, he insists he can make the big one right at home. "It sure would be easier if I lived elsewhere," he admits. "But where and how I live is important to me. This is a good retreat."



The cast and crew of *Wildrose*, a mixture of Hollywood and local professionals, pose with a large cast member.

Laurel Cazin

year's Cannes Film Festival; its U.S. premiere will be held on the Fourth of July in Virginia, Minnesota (pop. 14,000), a town in the center of "the Range."

Like Sandra Schulberg, Peter Markle, writer-director of *The Personals*, didn't see any good reason to leave his hometown when it came to making his first film. "Minneapolis was the ideal place to shoot," he says. "Most of the locations were a mile or so from my house, the crew was good and local—and so were the investors, all

eraman Greg Cummins and actors Chris Mulkey and John Jenkins, made the film as an audition piece, never expecting fame or fortune from it. Yet *Loose Ends* was shown at many festivals, garnering the kinds of notices many a Hollywood filmmaker would love to get. Morris, Wozniak, and Mulkey moved on to Los Angeles and found work in commercial features. In 1981, Morris and Wozniak returned to Minneapolis to make *Purple Haze*, a draft-dodging comedy-drama set in the late sixties. Both *Purple Haze* and Peter Markle's *The Personals* were among the twenty films invited to the Deauville film festival in September.

"We call ourselves Minnesota filmmakers now in Los Angeles," Wozniak explains. "There are great advantages to shooting in Minnesota, among them the great logistical support, the investors, the cooperation of local institutions, and, of course, the lower expenses. In L.A. some guy might ask a thousand dollars just to use his driveway for a day, but in Minneapolis we can get such things free."

Then there's the team of John Gaspard and Jack Steinmann, two writer-director-producers who started as high school whiz kids making ragged but inventive parodies, shot in Super-8. Now in their early twenties, Gaspard and Steinmann have recently completed two videotape features, *Tenants*, a wry comedy, and *Deception*, a thriller. They got their early training at Film in the Cities (FITC), in St. Paul. Founded in 1970 to provide instruction in "personal" film for high school students, FITC now mainly teaches adults, and last summer completed its first narrative production.

"There had to be some way to support our serious screenwriters," explains FITC's executive director, Rick Weise, "and also to give our students professional experience." Weise dreamed up the Minnesota Screen Project, a competition for half-hour scripts that drew sixty submissions. FITC commissioned Mikhail Bogin, a studio-trained Russian émigré now teaching at SUNY-Purchase, to choose a winner from five finalist scripts and direct it. Bogin decided on Gary Jenneke's *Finders, Keepers*, about a hapless farmer (not peasant) who becomes some kind of hero when \$25,000 is lost on his property; the joke is that he doesn't know where.

FITC hired area professionals for major production roles, and in turn they each chose a student apprentice. Everyone was paid for the three-week shoot. Weise hopes to sell *Finders, Keepers* to cable, European television, and U.S. public television, and is

The first real effort at regional independent feature filmmaking in the Twin Cities (that is, aside from the dreary fishing travelogues now spoofed by John Candy and company on "SCTV") was *Loose Ends*, a blue-collar drama shot in 1974 by the husband-wife team of David Morris and Victoria Wozniak. Morris and Wozniak, with cam-

counting on repeating the whole process next year.

In its early days Film in the Cities gained a national reputation for its work in children's filmmaking, and was one of the country's first major media centers. Now FITC offers a two-year degree in filmmaking (through the state community college system); it also exhibits photography and performance art and screens films at its headquarters—a former bank building whose vaults now house the film collection.

FITC is not the only place in the Twin Cities where one can view independently produced films (Walker Art Center and the twenty-year-old University Film Society have renowned programs), and it's not the only place to study filmmaking (the Minneapolis College of Art and Design offers a bachelor of fine arts). But it is the place that most often makes connections for area filmmakers. It's a "center" in the traditional sense of the word.

Rick Weise, a filmmaker himself, sees the changes in FITC as a natural evolution. "Our first master plan pretty much described where we are now, except it was only supposed to take three years," he says. "Our main focus is still education, but there's much more to be done." FITC's well-stocked Filmmakers' Access Center is available to subscribing members; Weise hopes to add a similar program for artists working with sound technology.

No one in the Twin Cities makes a full-time living making documentaries. The market is small, the funds are hard to come by, and the smaller but equally strong video community (led by University Community Video, a counterpart of Film in the Cities) is more likely to tackle documentary subjects.

But documentary films do get made, usually by those so engrossed in their subject that they feel compelled to put it on film. Jim Gambone had a long, hard climb to get *Agent Orange: A Story of Dignity and Doubt* paid for and distributed, even after Martin Sheen agreed to do the narration and after several PBS stations aired the film. *Agent Orange*, an outgrowth of an FITC documentary production class, was the organization's first sponsored effort. Gambone has gone independent on his next film, *Foreclosure*, a twenty-minute narrative that deals with historical trends in the family farm economy.

Foreclosure dramatizes the "penny sales" of the Depression, when the neighbors of a down-on-his-luck farmer would attend the auction of his goods and bid

ridiculously small amounts—as low as five or ten cents—to buy the property and give it back to their friend. (Last August, several farmers revived the practice.) Gambone convinced the residents of Milan, Minnesota, to make the film as a community education project. The money was raised from individual contributors and a few foundation grants; farmers loaned props and property. Several dozen rural churches agreed to buy prints even before the film was made.

"I like the region for its people and its history," Gambone notes. "It's the only area with a real tradition of progressive roots—the Farmer-Labor party, the rural co-ops. This group of filmmakers cooperates, too, and doesn't indulge in cutthroat competition."

take," he admits. "Now, the only thing that's really lacking here is experience in financing and distributing a theatrical feature."

Two reasons the local market for documentaries is soft are the absence of cable television in the Twin Cities and the local PBS affiliate's policy of avoiding outside producers. To attempt to deal with the problem of distribution, the Minnesota Public Programming Corporation (MPPC) was formed in 1974. According to Lowell Pickett, a partner in MPPC, the group has modest goals: "We just want to make two to four quality programs a year, for both regional and national distribution." MPPC's productions have included a series of multimedia shows and avant-gardist Richard Foreman's video-theater piece

"I like the region for its people and its history," Jim Gambone notes. "It's the only area with a real tradition of progressive roots—the Farmer-Labor party, the rural co-ops."

Other recent documentaries have been similarly guided by the urgency of their subjects. Minneapolis native Don McGlynn combined his love of jazz with his USC film school training to make *Art Pepper: Notes From a Jazz Survivor*, which was shown at this year's Filmex and will be screened this month at the London Film Festival. Just before Pepper died earlier this year, he saw the finished film and liked its fragmented, almost improvisational style; McGlynn next plans a profile of Sam Fuller, shot Fuller-style, with abrupt editing and tight close-ups.

For dedication to a subject, John Goodell of St. Paul may be the Twin Cities champ. He spent ten years making *Always a New Beginning*, an exploration of the treatment of brain-damaged children that received a 1973 Oscar nomination for Best Feature Documentary. He has since made *Jackpot*, a narrative feature. Something of a senior statesman in Twin Cities film, Goodell, a onetime product engineer, has been a filmmaker for twenty years. He's honest about the slim chance independent films have of reaching a wide audience, but he is also increasingly impressed by the pool of production talent in Minnesota. "I made my films alone, which was a mis-

City Archives (shown by many PBS affiliates in 1981). Its current project, *Flashbacks*, is a series of dramatic vignettes based on the reminiscences of senior citizens, meant to show the positive side of aging.

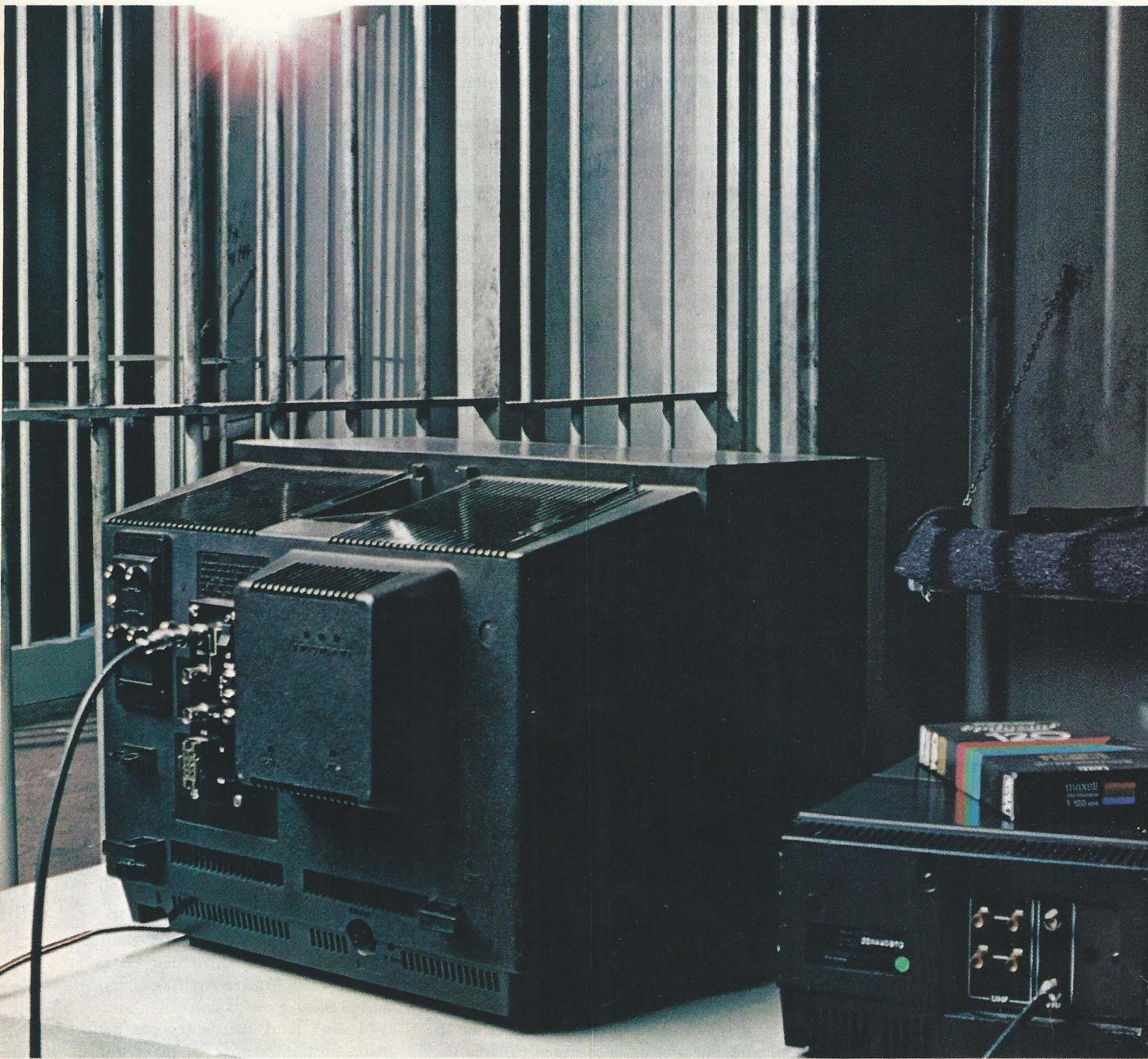
One of the area's most successful full-time documentarists is Kathleen Laughlin. After some years spent making short experimental and animated films (*Susan Through Corn, Madsong*), she turned to making documentaries on a wide range of local subjects: the Chicano and Hmong (Laotian refugee) communities, the touring Picasso retrospective that began at Minneapolis's Walker Art Center, experimental theater companies.

"I don't think there's any one perfect place in this country to make films," Laughlin observes. "But I happened to start here, and I like it. The filmmakers aren't so haughty—we're flexible and not so frivolous. I don't seem to be shooting film as much as I used to, with my days spent on the phone or in meetings. But I'm learning more about distribution; it's good for me."

For many years, there were two separate but hardly equal camps of Minnesota

Continued on page 82

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History of the (Film) World, Part II

Douglas Gomery

For decades, film historians have told us the same old story. Now, the next generation of scholars, asking different questions and using new methods, is writing its own version.

After a decade of neglect in favor of glamour issues like film theory and criticism, the stock of film history at last seems to be rising in academic esteem. Signs of this resurgence appear almost daily in the form of specialized conferences, individual issues of journals devoted solely to the subject, and the publications of university presses. In fact, if judged by the publication rate of basic surveys, the field of film history seems to be booming. Within the space of three years we have seen three brand-new volumes and three significant revisions of older works. Like their predecessors, all share a set of underlying assumptions that reveal less about the history of film than about the way film history, until very recently, has been understood.

Most surveys organize their material into a narrative. Film history becomes the "story" of past films and filmmakers, and this story utilizes the familiar devices of narrative: exposition and closure, heroes and villains, dramatic crises and resolutions. Courtesy of the auteur theory, which has now been widely adopted not only by film critics but by film historians and scholars as well, the heroes are generally the directors and the villains are the moguls. Boastful, crude, and powerful, the moguls—themselves a confluence of press releases, anecdotes, popular biographies, and even movies—make wonderful heavies. As Arthur Knight writes in the 1979 edition of *The Liveliest Art*, "The American producers seemed to be irresistibly drawn to strong, creative personalities, to artists with a flair for using film to make a highly personal observation on life and the ways of the world. Invariably, the studios put them under contract with considerable fanfare, then proceeded to force them into the mold of their own preconceptions of what constituted good box office." Artists against businessmen—this is the motive force of traditional film history. So Griffith struggled against New York financiers; von Stroheim's great

masterpiece, aptly named *Greed*, was mutilated by studio bosses; and Welles's career was ruined by his inability to play the game.

This approach serves only to mystify our understanding of film history by deflecting our attention from social and economic forces. To the extent that it does emphasize economics, it makes economic analysis easy, obviating the need for reading corporate records, such as balance sheets. It is the Great Man theory of history at its most simplistic. Towering geniuses move it ahead; petty moneygrubbers set it back.

The narrative strategy of film history is facilitated by a biological premise that permeates the language. The cinema is "born" with Edison; Griffith is the "father" of editing. Such logic helps writers personalize, dramatize, and structure film history in chronological sequence. If, say, the French New Wave was born in 1960 with *Breathless* and died in May '68, it can be treated as a self-contained organism with a clearly delimited life span.

Many film histories manipulate their material to fit neat categories, often dictated by decade and national boundaries, following the formula established by Knight twenty-five years ago when *The Liveliest Art* was first published. All begin with the technological origins of the cinema. We learn of the inventors and innovators: Thomas Edison, Georges Méliès, and the Lumière brothers. Next comes the transition from "primitive" cinema to D. W. Griffith. At this point a purely chronological discussion gives way to organization by country. So, for the twenties, we learn about the U.S. studio system, German expressionism, and Soviet montage. (Some authors add short chapters on French impressionism and an emerging international avant-garde movement.) The coming of sound signals the effective end of all national cinemas and movements save Hollywood, which is discussed studio by studio or

We should seek out categories that help us understand the past, not those that merely create the best stories.

auteur by auteur throughout the thirties and forties. *Citizen Kane* usually represents the pinnacle of this era. Regarding the foreign cinema of the thirties, surveys content themselves with Knight's categories: France (Renoir), Germany (Nazi propaganda), and Great Britain (documentaries).

The surveys' treatment of post-World War II cinema is even more fragmented. After running through the three standard areas—postwar Hollywood, Italian neorealism, and the French New Wave—they degenerate into a free-for-all consisting of Knight's "international trends"—Swedish (Bergman), British, Czechoslovakian, Soviet, and Third World cinema—plus the idiosyncratic interests of particular writers. Logically, surveys ought to cover cinema and cinematic institutions from all countries. If that is too much for one book, then we deserve multivolume considerations like those by Jean Mitry and Georges Sadoul. We should seek out categories that help us understand the past, not those that merely create the best stories.

The narrative and biological framework of historical surveys is buttressed by an unstated teleological bias. That is, they regard historical change as moving toward the fulfillment of a final cause. For example, we learn from Gerald Mast, in *A Short History of the Movies* (1971), that "the idea for sound was born with film itself." We often hear that a certain director, from his or her earlier work, "was destined to create masterworks." A teleological assumption further simplifies, not to say annihilates, historical causation. Why should we look for causes at all if a film or a movement contains its own internal motivation? In reality, it is most often the case that there is no final cause, just a rather complex set of forces coming together in a certain way at a certain time.

Finally, film histories eclectically combine a number of contradictory assumptions about how history works. They lack a coherent theory of change. For example, in one decade, the twenties, technological innovation is used to explain the coming of sound. During the thirties, with the studios feeling the

Movie palaces like Chicago's old Tivoli were built to attract the middle class and well-to-do, not the working class.



Theatre Historical Society

effects of the Depression, technology gives way to economics, only to rise again in the fifties with 3-D and the wide-screen processes. Or else, a narrative survey history that stresses economics in the teens and technology in the twenties will stress aesthetics in the thirties. But what of technology in the thirties and forties, when noiseless recording and magnetic tape were developed? Sound processes changed constantly, but when technological changes like these were not sufficiently dramatic to create narrative pleasure for the reader, they are ignored.

Until quite recently, there was a paucity of raw data that excused slipshod film history. For example, prior to 1970, historians looked in vain for original archival documents of a single Hollywood studio. But now this situation has changed dramatically. The Warner Bros. collection is deposited at Princeton University and the University of Southern California, the United Artists papers are at the University of Wisconsin, and the RKO collection is housed by UCLA. Most of the trade papers are now on microfilm. Moreover, throughout the studio period, the majors (and minors) were constantly suing and being sued. Courtroom data generated by these cases, part of the public record, has become a treasure trove for historians.

Traditional surveys have long been hobbled by a kind of Hollywood centrism, the assumption that all the action took place in Burbank or Universal City, not in our own communities. This bias is partly a testimony to the success of decades of studio public relations, partly a result of the traditional disrepute of local history, always in the shadow of national history. But local or regional changes are, after all, the building blocks of national trends. In any community, an enormous amount of primary material on local exhibition practices is buried in newspaper files, city and county building permits, court records, and transcripts of public hearings on censorship and theater safety.

Based on this data, a quiet revolution in film historiography is now under way. Scholars are turning from macrohistory to microhistory, from surveys to monographs, reformulating basic approaches in a nonnarrative, nonlinear fashion. The new work focuses on the structure and conduct of the industry as a whole (production, distribution, and exhibition); it examines corporate behavior, industrial relations, and the place of film in international trade, as well as the films and filmmakers themselves. It takes into account the interaction of social, aesthetic, economic, and technological forces.

Here, for example, are three areas where the new film historians have shed some light, dispelling the legacy of half-truths bequeathed by the work of the past.

Who Went to the Movies?

This is not so easy a question to answer as it seems. We have a pretty good idea of who went to the movies from the forties on, but prior to that decade little reliable data is available. Most surveys take it for granted that during Hollywood's golden age all segments of American society attended the movies in equal proportions. In

his book, *Film: The Democratic Art* (1976), Garth Jowett finesse the issue and, like others before him, simply assumes that movie attendance was a regular part of life for all Americans.

Other classic surveys, like Benjamin Hampton's *A History of the Movies* (1931) and Lewis Jacobs's *The Rise of the American Film* (1939), imply that the movie audience was largely poor, immigrant, and working-class. More recently, Robert Sklar, in his book *Movie Made America* (1975), made this point explicit, and used it to argue that since early audiences were largely proletarian, the movies they patronized subverted traditional middle-class values. Sklar's provocative claims have sparked a reassessment of the work of pioneers like Edwin S. Porter, particularly by Marxist scholars interested in ideology.

Since there is no direct evidence, we must turn to indirect evidence, like architectural and business records, to address these questions. Consider the case of the picture palace. It is tempting to assume, with Jowett and his colleagues, that downtown movie palaces attracted patrons from all income levels. Film history surveys are dotted with photographs of theaters from "America's downtown," Times Square and vicinity: the Roxy, the Paramount, and Radio City Music Hall. However, the majority of movie palaces were not situated downtown, but in outlying neighborhoods. What type of neighborhood in, say, Chicago, generated the demand necessary to construct a 5,000-seat picture palace several miles from downtown?

To find out we have to turn to urban history. The twenties were a decade of suburbanization. People with the money, relying on streetcars or subway transportation, began to move

away from the downtown area. Not surprisingly, the new "suburbanites" sought shopping and entertainment amenities near their new homes. Outlying business and recreational centers quickly grew up to rival downtowns.

Such educated and well-off moviegoers were crucial in expanding midwestern port cities such as Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland, and Milwaukee. Indeed, in Chicago, America's second largest city during the twenties, the number of outlying picture palaces far surpassed the number found in the Loop. The officers of Balaban & Katz, Chicago's dominant theater chain, who understood the needs of the new Chicago suburbanites, built their first theaters near streetcar transfer points in distant Chicago neighborhoods. Only then did they build their flagship, the Chicago Theatre, downtown.

What was true of post-World War I Chicago was true of the rest of the nation as well. In Manhattan in the twenties, population growth was concentrated in the area north of 145th Street, five to eight miles from Times Square. Apartment dwellers there demanded their own picture palaces, so that in a relatively short time, one-fifth of Manhattan's twenty largest movie theaters came to be located in this area, including the 4,000-seat Loew's 175th Street Theater, and the RKO Coliseum at 181st Street. With only one-twentieth of the population, northern Manhattan supported one-sixth of all the picture palaces on the island.

What kinds of people exerted such an extraordinary demand for movie entertainment? During the twenties, the district north of 145th Street provided a comfortable, uncongested residential environment. Its well-off residents lived in modern apartment buildings. They were second- and third-generation Americans, with education levels far above the

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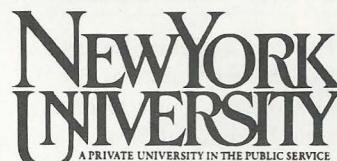
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Survey histories suggest the giants of film were nearsighted about television. This scenario couldn't be further from the truth.

city's average. These upscale adults and their children had the necessary free time and discretionary income to frequently attend movies.

New studies demonstrate that after the First World War, middle- and upper-class audiences living in what were then considered the suburbs attended the movies far more often than the rest of the population. The movie audience can be characterized as predominantly poor, immigrant, and working-class only during the nickelodeon period (1905 to 1914), and even this period is being nibbled away at by new evidence, marshaled by scholars like Robert Allen and Russell Merritt, that suggests that exhibitors in cities such as Manhattan and Boston were trying to tailor their shows to the middle class and leave the working class behind.

Local records in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reveal that as early as 1909, the Saxe brothers, Milwaukee's movie exhibition moguls, opened a 900-seat pleasure palace called the Princess aimed directly at middle- and upper-class audiences. The Saxes invited members of what would become Milwaukee's chamber of commerce to an exclusive premiere. Ushers, opera seats, cut flowers, palms, and a small orchestra served to create a milieu similar to that of Milwaukee's upper-crust legitimate theaters.

The results of this research indicate that the pattern of suburban moviegoing began long before our modern era of drive-ins and multiplexes. Balaban & Katz pioneered a suburban strategy as early as 1917, and other exhibitors quickly followed. Recent studies also throw doubt on the assertion that post-World War I films, or even those of the nickelodeon period, were from an audience point of view subversive to middle-class values. Finally, the prevalence of middle-class patrons in early movie audiences should even make us question the widespread notion that movies are the twentieth century's first mass medium. This distinction, if it is one, should probably go to television.

The Coming of Sound and Color

Like the problem of the movie audience, the coming of sound and color raises key questions for the history of film. First, why does movie technology change? Is innovation itself sufficient, or are other factors involved, such as economic necessity and ideology? Second, does change occur abruptly and dramatically, as most film histories suggest, or is it more likely to be gradual and matter-of-fact?

Warner Bros., and to a lesser degree Fox, pioneered talking pictures. Warners did so, the histories say, because it was on the verge of bankruptcy. This is not entirely true.

In 1925, Paramount; Lowe's, the parent company of the newly formed Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer; and First National had come to dominate the film industry through vertical integration, that is, the ownership and control of film production, distribution, and exhibition. Smaller firms like Warners and Fox needed to expand, or be squeezed out of the market. Warners and Fox aggressively looked for ways to differentiate

their products, and they acquired (or built) a chain of picture palaces. Beginning in 1925, and backed by financial giants—Goldman, Sachs (Warners) and Halsey, Stuart (Fox)—these two medium-size companies, in the space of five years, came to occupy the number-one and number-two places in the industry. Pioneering talkies was simply one part of their expansionary strategies. In this case, crisis is not the best explanation of industrial change. The quest for larger profits and market power provides an explanation that is more consistent with corporate records and accounts in the trade press.

As for the major corporations, they colluded and adopted sound as soon as they recognized that they could make more with talkies than silent films. Acting as a group, they were able to play the giant corporate patent holders, AT&T and RCA, against each other to secure reasonable contractual terms. Paramount, MGM, and United Artists signed for sound on the same day (May 11, 1928) in identical contracts. They then programmed talkies in their picture palaces, eliminating stage shows and live orchestras, and thereby cutting the costs of presentation. Even though the costs of films rose, profits rose much faster. The coming of sound was an example of an industry taking advantage of technological change to double, even triple, profits.

New technology cannot take hold unless economic conditions demand it. But it is also true that change cannot succeed unless it fulfills an ideologically determined need. Moreover, it is often ideology, coupled with economics, that explains the form innovation takes. In the case of Hollywood, that ideology has been labeled "realism." Consider the case of color, a technology that was introduced during the twenties but did not become the industry standard until the fifties. To be sure, there were problems along the way; for instance, early color stock was easily scratched. But the major obstacles were not technical. Color was finally adopted because, as Edward Buscombe stressed in *Jump Cut*, the introduction of color television "lowered the relative resale [to television] value of theatrical features made in black and white." But both the nature of the innovation and the long delay in adopting it were dictated by the ideology of realism as well as economics.

Color, of course, replicates the real world more closely than black and white, but by the thirties black and white, for technological reasons, had come to be regarded as the true measure of reality, and color was perceived as "unrealistic." (As Buscombe noted, color was first used in genres that were least realistic: comedies, musicals, and costume dramas.) When, as Edward Branigan pointed out in *Film Reader*, color technology further evolved in the late thirties, with improvements in the camera, lighting equipment, and laboratory processing, it became possible to make color films using lighting levels extremely close to the black-and-white standards. At the same time, the Technicolor Corporation introduced a faster film stock, which made possible further improvements. This meant that color could finally achieve effects that up to then had been the province of black and white: softer images, retention of shadows, sharper close-ups. Color became less garish and more natural. Technological

change, in this case, responded to the need for realism.

Economics played a key role in the adoption of both sound and color. But the speed with which motion pictures assimilated sound, compared with the long time it took color to be widely used, can only be explained by the power of realism. Sound was immediately perceived and accepted as realistic; color was not.

Television: Technology and the Studios

It is an axiom of most film histories that the major studios resisted technological change until it was forced on them. We have already seen that this was not true in the case of sound. Nevertheless, the notion persists that the studios, technologically speaking, had (and still have) their heads in the sand; it has been repeatedly used to explain why they did not get into television after World War II. The majors, so the story goes, simply withheld stars and other talent from the new medium until they had no alternative. Only then, utterly defeated, did the stubborn moguls finally begin to produce shows for television and regularly distribute features and shorts to the networks and local stations.

The surveys suggest three reasons why the giants of the film industry were so nearsighted. First, executives deluded themselves with the belief that the public would soon tire of the new fad; after a wave of initial interest, Americans would naturally return to the movie house. Second, they believed that television programming could never attain the "quality" of movie productions. Third, they were just dumb, too set in their ways to see the handwriting on the wall.

This scenario couldn't be further from the truth. Every

major Hollywood studio tried to enter the television industry. For example, even before 1945 Paramount secured a share of the DuMont network, which included three owned-and-operated stations (Paramount itself owned KTLA in Los Angeles). And, on the exhibition side, the United Paramount Theatre Chain in 1951 gained control of the American Broadcasting Corporation. Yet the motion picture companies failed to obtain a real foothold. Why?

Barriers to their entry into television proved too high. Although radio stations and newspapers acquired television licenses in America's large cities, and hooked up with NBC or CBS, the movie companies lacked the political muscle to win over the Federal Communications Commission, which was unfavorably disposed toward the industry because of the government's 1948 antitrust decision that had divested the studios of their theaters. The timing could not have been worse. The decision guaranteed that the majors would never secure a significant place in the ownership of U.S. television networks and stations.

Encountering obstacles in their efforts to buy into the burgeoning television industry, the motion picture studios tried to better conventional home television through the presentation of "theater television" as a differentiated product. The consumer could see television events at the local theater in the form of spectaculars, major news stories, and special sporting events like the World Series.

All of the major Hollywood corporations participated in a nationwide effort to sell theater television. In March 1950, only ten U.S. theaters had theater television; by November there were sixteen; by July 1951 the number reached twenty-

Continued on page 89

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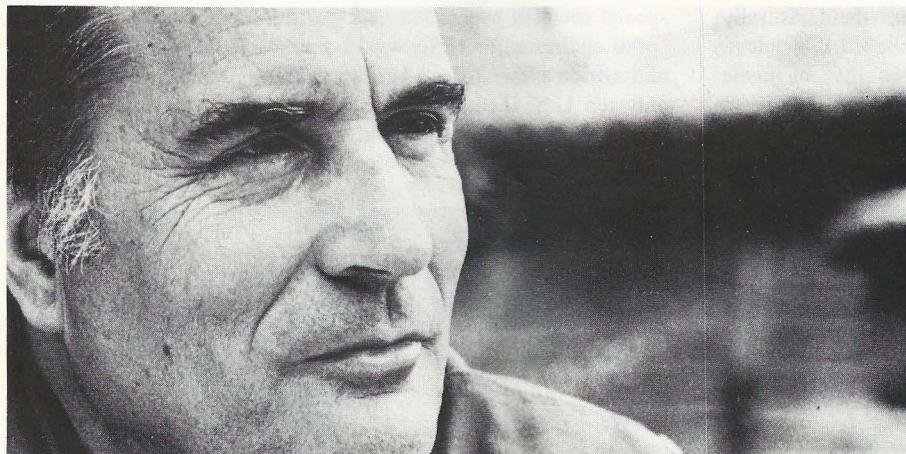
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L E T T E R F R

MITTERRAND'S

Has the election of a Socialist president brought a cultural revolution to French television? Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

Marcel Ophuls



François Mitterrand



Marcel Ophuls

The recent decline in the use of subtitles for the translation of foreign films shown on French television had just been mentioned in passing. Abruptly pushing his glasses to the top of his head, Pierre Kast leaned forward across the conference table, his voice tense and his expression grave: "Mon cher maître, do you realize what this will mean? Entire generations growing up without ever hearing Gary Cooper's voice."

There was a moment of stunned silence. Sitting across from us, the emissary from the new Socialist government seemed momentarily flustered. Thus called on to consider an imminent threat to French culture as we know it, the young and elegant Parisian attorney tried his very best to look seriously concerned, but merely succeeded in appearing puzzled.

"But surely we all agree," he pointed out with some diffidence, "that there are far too many American products shown on national TV. And surely you, as the French film directors' representatives, cannot fail to recognize the need for some protective measures against the kind of unrestrained and cynical commercial exploitation which the great multinational companies—"

Someone else interrupted impatiently. Was it Bertrand Tavernier or Costa-Gavras? Frankly, I don't remember: "Yes, yes, of course, mon cher maître. We agree! That's what we've been saying for years, when no one in power seemed willing to listen. But you don't seem to understand. We're not talking about 'Dallas' here, or 'Love Boat.' We're talking about *Gary Cooper's voice*."

Shortly thereafter, the meeting broke up. And a few months later, the government commission over which our distinguished guest had presided turned in its "Report on the Reform of the French Film Industry" to the new minister of culture, M. Jack Lang. It wasn't a bad report, as reports on the reform of French film industry go: It recommended some measures to

MEDIALAND

reduce the excessive concentration of distribution circuits (Gaumont, UGC, and Parafrance) and pleaded for increased state subsidies to quality films and for a better coordination of efforts to export French cinema abroad, particularly in the United States. It asked for a sharp increase in the prices paid by state television for the acquisition of motion pictures originally produced for theatrical release. Many of these recommendations had been discussed that day, and had been advocated by the Société des Réaliseurs de Films for a long time before that. (SRF is a kind of Directors Guild, without the wealth and the clout.) But, alas, in the commission's report, there was no mention of Pierre Kast's warning about the probable disappearance of Gary Cooper's voice.

At this point, some impatient reader more familiar with the *Hollywood Reporter* than with the *Cahiers du Cinéma* might well ask: "Who is Pierre Kast?" Well, for that matter, who is Gary Cooper?

In answer to the first of these hypothetical questions, Pierre Kast is a veteran of the old New Wave, an early contributor to the *Cahiers*, and, incidentally, also one of the very few French filmmakers who were genuinely active in the Resistance movement during the war. At the Liberation, he was still a very young man, and, like most of his friends, he made no secret of his Communist sympathies. Somewhere between Budapest and Prague, he became gradually disillusioned with, then bitterly resentful of, Soviet power and influence. Now in his early sixties, he remains a staunch Marxist, at least philosophically. You would think that after twenty-five years in opposition to Gaullist policies, Gaullist censorship, Gaullist right-wing protectionism, such a man would be jumping for joy. And so he was at first—and so were most of us! Then what's all this about Gary Cooper's voice?

It's my guess that since May 10, 1981, the day of François Mitterrand's upset vic-

tory, a great many French film and television directors, writers, and critics, not to mention political journalists, have come to feel a bit like my friend Pierre. Even though all of us have come to resent the mass invasion of our cultural territory by the powerful and increasingly cynical forces of American multimedia schlock, most of us have been nurtured on and continue to draw spiritual sustenance from the mainstream tradition of Hollywood moviemaking. How can we make clear to a young and enthusiastic Socialist minister of culture that this only *seems* like a contradiction? How, for that matter, can it be made clear to Charles Bluhdorn or Kirk Kerkorian?

Let me try to explain! But first, a break for station identification, and a note from our sponsors. Don't go away, we'll be right back!

Washington, D.C.
November 10, 1981

Dear Marcel:

We'd be delighted if you would do an article for us focusing on the changes in French television brought about by the new government. Don't hesitate to use personal experiences; also some comparisons with television in other European countries and in the United States might be helpful.

Sincerely yours,
Tony Chemasi
Executive Editor
American Film

Neuilly-sur-Seine
November 26, 1981

Dear Tony,

Your request causes some problems for me. The truth is, I don't want to be corralled into writing a critical piece about the French Socialists' apparent designs on the television state monopoly for the sole pur-

pose of reinforcing the intellectual comfort of your American readers.

To put it even more bluntly, unless you give me the opportunity of showing how "Company Town," the documentary I was making for ABC, was deliberately aborted by the Hollywood motion picture academy—with the articulate support of the corporation lawyers at ABC (the memos are still in my files!)—in order, presumably, to protect David Begelman from whatever mischief it felt I might be up to, it's just no go.

My reluctance to state my misgivings about the new French government's "audiovisual" policies in the pages of your magazine is not essentially motivated by bread-and-butter issues, though these, as you know, are nothing to be sneezed at. The fact is that in most important areas of political life, like social justice, human rights, fiscal reform, the abolition of capital punishment, relief for the unemployed, and assistance to Third World countries, I'm vastly supportive of François Mitterrand's presidency, and grateful for the victory of the Socialists. Therefore, the almost irresistible urge to explain why I don't trust this French president's motives (or any French president's) any further than I could throw the Arc de Triomphe in matters pertaining to my own profession is strongly checked by my disinclination to allow my analysis merely to confirm the prejudices of all those mellow Beverly Hills entrepreneurs, whose good faith and personal honesty some of us have had ample opportunity to appreciate. Whatever sneering they might wish to do at the expense of European intellectual pinkos, they'll have to do without any encouragement from me.

Anyway, my checkered cosmopolitan career has taught me that, come rough-cut screening time, it doesn't really matter very much if some poor, hassled, stubborn, middle-aged sucker like me is facing a battery of public television bureaucrats or confronted with a gaggle of studio executives



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supported by a couple of sharp corporation lawyers. Power is power, whether public or private, and always reaches for control over individual expression. In a crunch, intuitive sympathies will unite the private-sector entrepreneurs with the public-sector bureaucrats, at the expense of individual creativity. I've seen it happen time and time again. Why is it, when the chips are down, that the Kremlin power brokers always prefer a Richard Nixon to some benighted Social Democrat?

Paradoxically, I'm convinced that politics has very little to do with it all. And that's just the trouble! Because when you've been typecast, as I have, as a "political filmmaker," finding out that politics has nothing to do with it is to discover that *content has nothing to do with it*, that you've been wasting your time. Somehow, it makes you feel doubly frustrated, a prisoner twice over, like being jailed for drunkenness while living in a ghetto. Nor is it very much a matter of weighing the chances of obtaining a fair return on the investors' money, which I've always considered a most legitimate concern.

No, what it really comes down to is the question of how you can turn out some sort of marketable commodity for some kind of audiovisual outlet, with a minimum of fuss and bother. This means steering clear of genuine controversy (as opposed to the kind of pseudocontroversy that "60 Minutes" specializes in). It means taking care in advance of any objections that might be raised by any interest group or political lobby, and making sure to keep enough editorial control in the hands of the merchandisers so that the product, in various forms, lengths, and contexts, can be presented on television screens in Hungary as well as in Chile, in Sweden as well as in South Africa. In the end, the "respectable and controversial" filmmaker's name is reduced to serve as a convenient label to paste onto a bottle of tasteless and innocuous slop. It's just another episode in the endless series of assaults on the obsolete principle of truth in advertising.

The only way out, or so I'm told, is to accept the condition of "independent filmmaking," to let oneself be pauperized for the sake of capturing truth in the raw (which is something I've never much believed in, anyway), and spend the rest of one's life smoking joints in some Soho fleabag. Well, I happen to like three-star restaurants in the Guide Michelin, and an occasional custom-tailored suit from Savile Row that gives me the illusion of looking like the late Anthony Eden. And if Emile de Antonio or the Maysles brothers don't

approve of that, they can stuff it! To be quite candid about it, I've never understood why I shouldn't be able to afford to spend a week at the Carlton during the Cannes Film Festival, if some minor film crook from the Champs-Elysées can. Just plain conceited, I guess.

An example of what I mean: Having recently completed a ninety-minute documentary for French television, on the Yorktown bicentennial celebrations, my new employers offered me a three-hour special on the history of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. As talking heads marathons go, this certainly looked like a choice assignment. The mere fact that I had been getting rather fed up with this whole cinematic genre is probably beside the point. During my very first meeting with the head of the department called "Creative Documentaries" (I swear to God, that's the official title), it soon became clear that, undoubtedly attracted by

Nazis, or faced show trials after the war in Budapest or Prague, or been reviled and slandered by their former comrades after having fought heroically in the French Resistance. What were we supposed to do, pretend that George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* had never been written?

On the contrary, the loss of a common and simple faith in the fight against fascism for a whole generation of workers and intellectuals seemed to me the central, the inevitable theme of such a film. André Malraux had created *L'Espoir (Man's Hope)*. Our film would have to be the follow-up: *L'Espoir trahi (Man's Hope Betrayed)*. How was I supposed to explain all this to the television executives in East Berlin? And even if they pretended to give me carte blanche for the sake of European détente, who would be the French official willing to front for them, and sell me down the river a year or so later, at final-cut time? Not, mind you, that I object on

In the end, the "respectable and controversial" filmmaker's name is reduced to serve as a convenient label to paste onto a bottle of tasteless and innocuous slop.

the change in the French political setup, it was the management of East German television that had suggested the project, as a vehicle for a major coproduction effort. The apparatchiks in East Berlin had even come up with an appropriate title: "The Dead Stay Young Forever."

My initial enthusiasm considerably dampened, I pointed out that such a title already gave the show away, that it provided a fairly good clue to official Communist attitudes toward a filmed commemoration of their "revolutionary heroes." The head of Creative Documentaries, a witty Parisian skeptic, was quick to agree: "Yes," he said, laughing, "the dead stay *dead* forever!" This gave me an opportunity to remind him that for most of the survivors, life hadn't exactly been a bed of roses, either. Stalin had imprisoned, tortured, and shot countless thousands of them. Others had perished in French concentration camps, or been betrayed to the

principle to coproductions with Eastern Europe. But *the International Brigades*? No way!

"Of course," said the witty and charming Parisian department chief. "How thoughtless of me! You know, Marcel, I've been so busy lately I just haven't taken the time to think all of this through. You're absolutely right, of course. Now, what would you say to a coproduction with the *West Germans*?" I replied that as far as I was concerned, any of the dwindling number of parliamentary democracies would do, whereupon he nodded cheerfully and left for the International Television Market in Cannes to see whom he could enlist. After that, it was "We'll get back to you" for a number of weeks. When at last I managed to get through the usual barrage of secretaries, my friendly neighborhood bureaucrat told me that, to his considerable surprise and disappointment, the West German television executives in Cannes

hadn't shown much enthusiasm.

So here I am, just a few months after the triumphant lifting of "Gaullist censorship" on *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and its highly publicized airing on French television, where some twenty million viewers are supposed to have watched all four and a half hours of it, back among the unemployed, and waiting for the phone to ring.

Is that President Mitterrand's fault? Of course not! He and his ministers have other, far more important responsibilities. But what his government and the Socialist party should, perhaps, be asking themselves when they happen to get around to it is how, in the light of the promises they made for twenty-five years to "liberate" French television, they can prevent people like me from getting into that kind of predicament, how they can protect us from being neutralized, sterilized, internationally standardized, satellitized. What tentative answers they have managed to come up with, until now, seem far from satisfactory to me. Then again, I wasn't too impressed with ABC's response to my problems, either.

And so I have to ask myself: Have I changed? Have I become even more eccentric and difficult to deal with than I used to be? Or is it the men I'm facing across various office desks who have grown more blandly repressive? Ideology, like politics, has very little to do with it, unless you're willing to admit that *audiovisual consumerism*, whether privately or publicly financed, has become an ideology unto itself. Frankly, I'm inclined to think so.

Have a nice day, Tony, and do get back to me.

Yours ever,
Marcel

Before I left France in 1968, after we in French television had lost our strike against government control and censorship, I was very happy working there. Even the censorship was fun in a way, because we had worked out all sorts of clever ways to outmaneuver the censors. Once, it must have been sometime in 1967, I was standing for two hours in the Ampex machine room, where our 16mm film was regularly transferred to videotape. Two gentlemen from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had come to demand the removal of a film clip I had included in my reportage about radical student unrest in West Berlin. The sequence they objected to was a scene from a movie written by an up-and-coming young German author named Günther Grass, and it starred Willy Brandt's teen-

age son in a fictional role, he being prominent among the student radicals in Berlin at the time. I had also interviewed young Brandt on the steps of the Reichstag in the course of my report. In the interview, he had some very nasty things to say about the decay of capitalist society, but that wasn't what the two diplomats were worried about. In the sequence from the Grass film, the boy was shown dancing on a half-sunken U-boat wreck, prancing up and down the deck with an old Iron Cross dangling across his naked chest.

At that time, Willy Brandt was the German foreign minister. The Quai d'Orsay had decided that showing young Brandt making a mockery of a German war decoration might offend his father. I had come prepared for just such a debate. At what seemed to me just the right moment, I took out a press clipping from my breast pocket and started translating the text from the original German. In a letter to a Hamburg newsweekly, Brandt senior stated categorically that his son's politics were his own business, and that if he wanted to become a movie star, that was perhaps unfortunate, but couldn't be helped.

Nonetheless, the two envoys from the foreign office refused to be demobilized. I thought that perhaps their stubborn behavior had a less apparent motive. Their boss, at the time, was Maurice Couve de Murville. Before becoming De Gaulle's minister, he had once been Marshal Pétain's emissary to the notorious Wiesbaden commission, which had negotiated economic cooperation with the Nazi victors after the French defeat in 1940. Could these strange diplomatic susceptibilities about dangling Iron Crosses be related to such distant events? Who knows? I just kept arguing.

After a while, the two young would-be censors began stealing surreptitious glances at their watches. This was a result of our technique: Our weekly magazine show was aired on Tuesdays; we always scheduled these sessions on Friday afternoons, as late as possible. Family weekends beckoned on country estates. Parisian custom prevailed where reasoning could not. Sighing politely, one of the two diplomats shrugged. "Ah, well, at least cut out that one close-up where you see the boy's nipples. Really, that's most indecent!"

I'm afraid you couldn't get away with such shenanigans any more, in Paris or anywhere else. Way back then, the television censors were still polite and slightly apologetic amateurs, always a bit on the defensive, always afraid of being ridiculed at a fashionable dinner party, where some Left Bank intellectual might point the fin-

ger of shame at them. The trouble, of course, is that François Mitterrand is something of a Left Bank intellectual himself. Remember when Roland Barthes got run over by a truck coming out of a restaurant in the Latin Quarter? He'd just been having lunch with François Mitterrand. Nobody could be more "with it" than that. I mean Mitterrand, of course, not Barthes! Barthes was "it," until he got run over, that is. So what's Mitterrand got to be afraid of? Nothing. And that's what I'm afraid of.

On another occasion, back in those pioneering days of Gaullist audiovisual monarchy, we were all sitting around in the producers' office, between assignments, our feet on the one and only desk, arguing once again about "freedom of information," and what it would be like to have it.

One of the two producers, who was a great friend of mine and a very funny fellow, looked out at the Paris skyline, a dreamy expression on his face. "You know how I would know when we have it?" he asked of no one in particular. "It would be on the evening news, during some political campaign or other. At one point, the anchorman would turn to the journalist covering the election, and he would ask: 'Jean-Louis, what did the candidate say in Orléans this afternoon?' And the journalist would glance up from the papers on his desk, looking very bored, and just say: 'Nothing very interesting, Jacques.' Now that would be freedom of information."

If it should turn out later that the candidate had made the most important statement of the campaign that day, the journalist could always be fired. But the decision of what makes the news, like the appreciation of art, falling in love, or a belief in God, is a matter of the individual sensibility.

André Harris, the man who described so cogently, some fifteen years ago, what political independence on television ought to look like, is now the program director of Channel One (TF-1). Recently, President Mitterrand sent a telegram to his network, which was published in the press, protesting the prime-time programming of a feature-length documentary celebrating the literary merits of one F. Mitterrand, a very talented writer. The film was scheduled at the last minute to replace the previously programmed telecast of "Sherlock Holmes," a rather popular show. From his vacation home in the South of France, the president of the French republic let it be known that he was a great Conan Doyle fan, and saw no good reason for the untimely switch in programming. With a great show of character and civic courage,

the network management decided to disregard the chief of state's own wishes, and stick to its original, sycophantic decision. Consequently, the French viewers were treated, that evening, to a massive dose of presidential prose. "Elementary, my dear Watson!"

So what does André Harris, my accomplice on *The Sorrow and the Pity*, think of his definition of audiovisual independence now? I don't really know; we haven't spoken in years.

Not long after that conflict over programming, the government's legislative plan for the liberation of French television was presented to the National Assembly. No more secret telephone calls from the Elysée Palace were to be tolerated, no more government interference would be possible. Henceforth, all policy decisions affecting the mass media would be made by nine high commissioners appointed for nine years, constituting "the High Authority," a sort of audiovisual Supreme Court, completely free from political pressure of any sort. And who would appoint these jealous guardians of liberty? Well, three would be named by the National Assembly (that is, by its Socialist majority), three by the Senate, which has a conservative majority, and three by President Mitterrand himself. Any questions?

And so on April 27, the Société des Réaliseurs de Films voted a motion of protest and sent it to the press, which ignored it completely:

"... At the very moment when a legislative measure concerning our professional future is discussed in parliament, we fail to understand why the government shows such undue haste and diligence in wanting to institute a High Authority, to be endowed with great powers of decision, when each of its members are to be chosen exclusively by political powers. To justify these measures, it's being argued that only the country's elected representatives are qualified to express their compatriots' majority will. This argument was also the one much used by the former majority in order to maintain its grip on the TV monopoly. It was particularly well expressed by the late President Pompidou when he spoke of 'The Voice of France' to explain why TV journalists could not be treated like any others. For twenty-five years, the new majority—and the SRF with it—had denounced these attitudes and revealed their hypocrisy. Where creative freedom and the liberty to inform are concerned, we feel that these arguments are without merit...."

(The time has come for me to confess: I am the sole author of this protest. When I

submitted it to a vote, I expected a good deal of opposition from Communist and other colleagues. The motion was passed within ten minutes, unanimously!)

On May 28, we received a reply from Pierre Joxe, president of the Socialist Group in the Chamber of Deputies: "... the High Authority, as it is now being planned, does not seem to deserve the accusations you formulate against its members, whose appointments will be neither revocable nor renewable, and who, consequently, will be free to resist any political pressure from whatever quarter it may come...."

Have we time for another flashback? In May 1968, a few nights after the historic confrontation between the Paris police and the students on the barricades, I attended a very small and informal meeting, "The Voice of France," it seems, was not to

Suddenly, my fellow director Michel Mitrani, who looks like a cross between a Vatican monsignor and a rather sleepy owl, climbed up on a chair, raised his right fist, and shouted: "We demand immediate and total independence from the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Finance." Then he paused, looked around the room, and asked softly: "How does that sound?"

Ten minutes later, standing dramatically under a single spotlight on Sound Stage Number One, like Lenin at the Finland Station, Max-Pol Fouquet read the declaration to the more than five hundred television employees, who greeted it with total silence. And then he came to the last sentence. Suddenly a great roar went up from the crowd, wild cheering was heard, hats were thrown into the air—and the Great French Television Strike of 1968 was on! It lasted six glorious weeks and involved fifteen thousand professionals. And, of course, it was lost.

The trouble is, Mitterrand is something of a Left Bank intellectual. So what's he got to be afraid of? Nothing. And that's what I'm afraid of.

be allowed to air what half of Paris had seen with its own eyes just by looking out the window. As filmmakers and journalists, most of us didn't feel much like "The Voice of France" just then, but rather like deeply humiliated individuals. At some point, I don't remember how or why, I found myself jammed into a small office along with some twenty other people. Downstairs, more than five hundred television professionals were waiting for some kind of statement, some written platform to start a strike on. Rather pompously, each of us managed to come up with an eloquent sentence or two. A producer of cultural documentaries, the art historian Max-Pol Fouquet, jotted everything down and then read it all back to us. It sounded very noble and rather tepid. We looked at each other, somewhat helplessly. With some trepidation, I contributed a shy criticism: "It seems to—how do you say? It seems to lack teeth, no?"

Toward the end, when the Communist-led CGT union leaders, in secret alliance with the Gaullist government, were trying to get people back to work, a professional orator had just repeated the much belabored point that we should cut our losses, since this was not, in Marxist terms, "a truly revolutionary situation." Whereupon another famous producer of culture films, a balding man in his early fifties, Jean-Marie Drot, got up on the podium and merely asked, rather sadly: "Can someone here please explain to me what's supposed to be so fucking revolutionary about requesting an autonomy which the BBC was granted in 1927?" Among the two thousand listeners, nobody, as far as I can remember, came up with an explanation.

When it was all over and the strike lost, I left France and only returned ten years later. Well, the Ministry of Information no longer exists, so I suppose my friend Mitrani got half his wish. It's called the

Ministry of Communications now, and it wears a bow tie.

The French have always had trouble, I guess, separating political power from the power to shape public opinion. Partly, I think, there is a basic difference between the intellectual attitudes that have grown out of the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Back in 1733, in his *Lettres philosophiques*, old Voltaire already had quite a bit to say about that. To some extent, the present situation of the mass media in many countries is just a historical accident, and still reflects the political situation as it existed in these countries at the time of the first radio broadcasting franchises, when the possible influence of the media didn't look so threatening to political leaders. The BBC obtained its charter early on, when those middle-class radio journalists must have looked rather seedy and harmless to distinguished Tory cabinet members sitting in their fine clubs.

Nor do I believe that "the free enterprise system" presents a viable alternative any more. The dissemination of news and entertainment based solely on the profit motive is bound to lead, and already has led, to even greater trivialization and cheap sensationalism. The "culture of narcissism" is upon us: Hundreds of talk-show hosts with blow-dry haircuts will drivel down at us from dozens of satellites circling around the Earth, while cute little *E.T.* monsters, relentlessly merchandized, will drive us ever further back into the warm, mindless security of the maternal womb.

In any case, the old magic of Hollywood is living on borrowed time. That unique balance between a few self-made millionaires—the Jewish entrepreneurial gamblers and the inventors and masters of the century's greatest art form, between Harry Cohn and Frank Capra—was a once-in-a-millennium mir-

Does our minister of culture really feel Castro could ever have replaced Zanuck as a partner in cinematic ventures? If so, I'm on my way to Switzerland.

As for West Germany, it benefited greatly from the fact that after the war Sir Carleton Greene (Graham's brother) was put in charge of making sure no Joseph Goebbels could ever get hold of a German microphone again. Would Willy Brandt ever have been elected, would Helmut Schmidt still be in power today, without the liberal and anti-Nazi influence a generation of German intellectuals was able to exercise on postwar radio and television? Probably not, and this might well explain why the Christian Democratic party is doing its very best to destroy Sir Carleton's handiwork, and quite nearly succeeding. All things considered, would *any* politician in power today voluntarily give up such a gigantic weapon for protecting his own policies? Judging from Ronald Reagan's attempts to reshape the Voice of America, judging from Margaret Thatcher's feud with the BBC during the Falklands war, it seems a most unlikely proposition.

acle, another freak accident. What these people shared was a common faith in the potential universality of show business, and a feeling of gratitude toward the country and the system of values that had allowed them to become successful. That feeling of gratitude and that basic optimism made them willing to take risks together, to trust their intuitions, to gamble on ideas and feelings. Where is that optimism and that gratitude now? Lost somewhere between Beverly Hills, Las Vegas, and the porn shops of Forty-second Street?

So M. Jack Lang, our minister of culture, probably has a point when he warns about the cynicism of the multimedia tycoons and denounces the cultural uniformity that their financial power, if left unchecked, will impose all over the world through the unavoidable proliferation of new technologies. That's why, for the past eighteen months, I've tried to do my part as a French delegate to the newly created

Fédération Européan des Réaliseurs Audiovisuels (FERA), an organization devoted primarily to the reaffirmation of basic authors' rights. We also do our best to defeat the American entertainment conglomerates' strategy in Brussels, where they have been lobbying the European Commission to eliminate all national subsidies for quality film productions within the European Community, on the shaky legal premise that such aid systems contradict the Treaty of Rome. In these areas, my minister and I seem to see eye to eye.

On the other hand, I think Monsieur Lang is very much mistaken, or else he's ignorant of motion picture history, if he thinks he should, or even *could*, counter-balance the "financial imperialism" of the multinational communications industry by promoting heavily subsidized coproduction schemes with banana republics or African dictatorships. Besides a fondness for Havana cigars and the prestige of military paraphernalia, what could Fidel Castro and the late Darryl F. Zanuck possibly have had in common? As far as I'm concerned, notwithstanding the negative influence of Wall Street brokers on the American entertainment business, a tenuous connection between Hollywood's continuing success story and the Bill of Rights still exists. Does our minister of culture really feel Castro could ever have replaced Zanuck as a partner in cinematic ventures? If so, I'm on my way to Switzerland.

I understand my good friend Costa-Gavras was sitting right next to our minister of culture in Mexico when the latter delivered his diatribe against Hollywood imperialism. If I had been Costa, I would have asked Monsieur Lang what French government would ever have allowed a picture to be made about a French embassy covering up political murder of French citizens in, say, the Central African Republic. Yet Universal Pictures commissioned and financed my talented Greek friend to direct *Missing*. So much for Hollywood imperialism.

You can't fight one form of collectivism with another. Massive terror bombing of civilian populations by communication satellites is a new form of collectivism. Totalitarian variations of socialist bureaucracies are a more traditional form. You don't fight fire with more fire! But there is still hope. No matter how many relays are being built to bring Big Brother's standardized fantasies into the public toilets of international airports, movies are still being written by individuals using ten fingers at the most to punch the keys on single typewriters, directors standing behind cameras

are still expected to make individual decisions, talented actresses and actors are still capable of smiling individual smiles, or weeping individual tears. Therein lies our only salvation from what has in fact become a crisis of civilization.

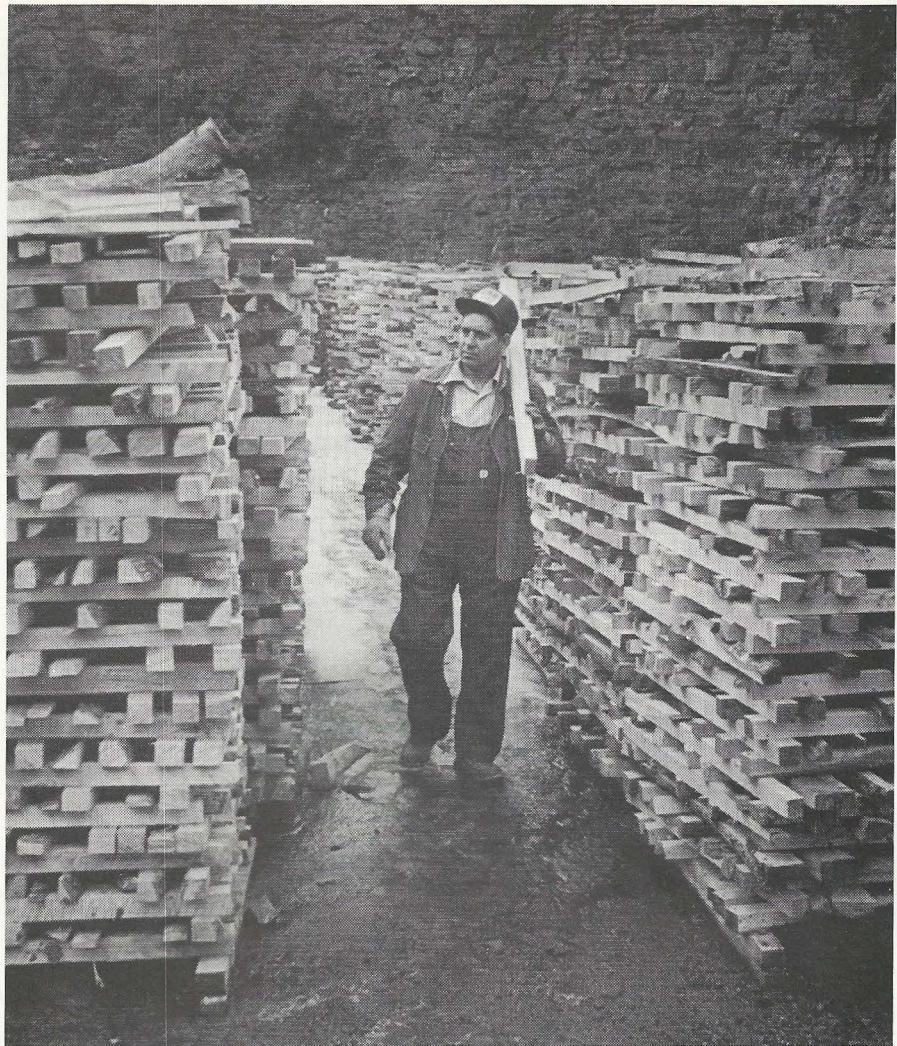
At a meeting of French and German filmmakers a month ago, I was asked to deliver the keynote address. In his opening speech, M. Jack Lang had reminded us of President Mitterrand's plans to encourage the creation of a new "European audiovisual space." Among various protective measures to be taken, the minister recommended that German television, like French television, impose a quota of fifty percent on the showing of foreign films. Afterward, at lunch, a department head at the main German network, ZDF, had a good laugh about that: "I don't know if that's a good thing or not, but we just don't have enough Herzog and Fassbinder to go around. Do you know what would happen if we followed your minister's advice? We'd have to fall back on all those old UFA turkeys from the Nazi period. That's what our older television audience is always clamoring for, anyway. With a fifty percent quota of German films, they'd finally get their wish, ha-ha!" Like the celebration of Custer's Last Stand, there may just possibly be some national and cultural traditions that are not worth preserving.

A little later, I said that in my opinion there was too much talk about "culture" in films and not enough about "art," because one is a collective concept and the other an individual one. Monsieur Lang nodded his head in agreement, which made me feel good.

In the everlasting and necessary confrontation between money and ideas, which forms the very basis of our profession, but also carries the seeds of its destruction, I think François Mitterrand is quite right to think that French socialism and European social democracy have a very important role to play, a unique contribution to make. What European filmmakers can do right now, next month, and next year is to use that reservoir of political goodwill, that notion of preserving "national identities" to reaffirm our individual identities, to preserve *le droit moral* of basic authors' rights, to fight for final cut.

By sheer process of elimination, it becomes quite obvious that the European community is the place to do that. Communist countries, for obvious reasons, are disqualified from participating in that struggle. In the Soviet Union, copyright protection doesn't even exist. In the Third

Continued on page 89



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“So whaddya doin’ tonight, Marty?”

“Staying at home, working
on my film, whaddya think?”

“So who’s in it?”

“Well, it’s got Bobby De Niro
and Jerry Lewis.”

“So what’s it called?”

“*The King of Comedy*, what else?”

Carrie Rickey

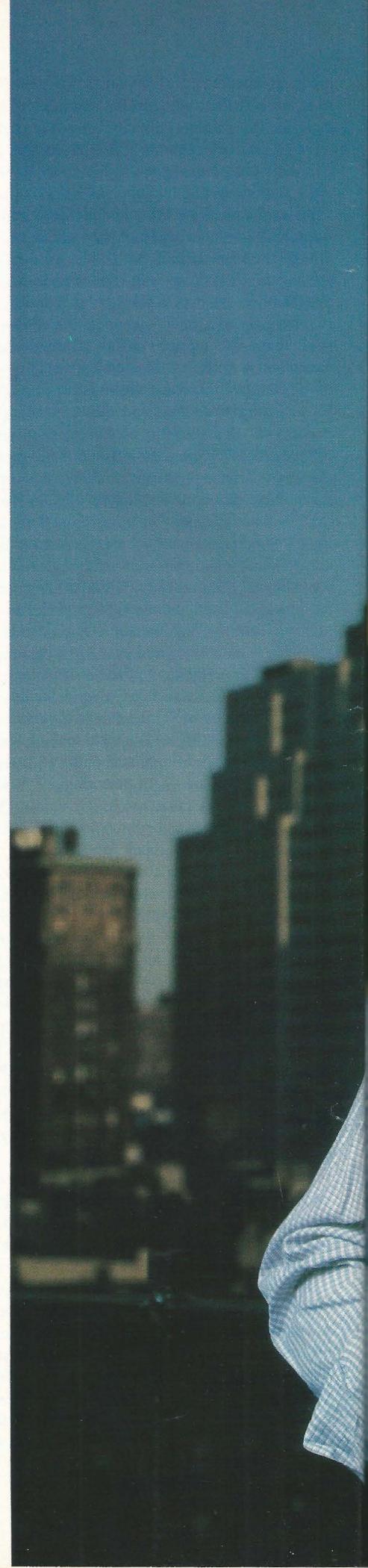
MARTY

Alert, with a bird of prey’s darting eyes and the tautness of an overwound watch, Martin Scorsese delivers a mock-pe-dantic lecture on the four stages of making a movie. His intense, bearded face belongs in a Renaissance altarpiece by Masaccio, but his staccato diction and flailing-arm body language are strictly from Jimmy Cagney. Suppressing a grin, though the corners of his mouth curl upward, talking and gesturing in double time, he states: “The first part of the film is preproduction, preparation. Then you shoot it. Part three’s the postproduction, the editing.” He adds, with a diabolical giggle, “Then comes the depression.”

Now in stage three of *The King of Comedy*, a fantasy-meditation on show biz starring Jerry Lewis and Robert De Niro, Scorsese, though fearful of the postpartum stage four, seems much more calm and less

depressed than in October 1981, when I visited him on the set. Whether dashing around the Manhattan studio in which *King* was filming or “relaxing”—that is, inhaling sushi in his trailer before a day’s shoot—Scorsese was totally frazzled. He was only just wrapping up four months of shooting. He had become appalled by the escalating cost of filmmaking, and whatever patience he had held in reserve to orchestrate his cast and associates, and satisfy the demands of New York unions, was wearing thin. “It’s a tough grind,” he said with a sigh. “Sustaining interest is so hard. There’s this languor on the set . . .”

Scorsese—now ten months into postproduction—is a man transformed. Admittedly, he prefers the editing stage. “More control,” he cackles, but a number of events outside his control have reshaped his life, making stage three different from what he had anticipated: the death of Dan





Johnson, his friend and domestic mainstay, and the estrangement of his wife, Isabella Rossellini, which coincided with a move from Fifty-seventh Street downtown to the formerly mean, now funky-chic streets of Tribeca. I assumed I'd find a flummoxed Scorsese in an advanced state of disequilibrium. But no. In an orderly loft—residence on the upper two floors, editing facilities below—he is neither manic nor panicky, just civilly pressured. It is Wednesday evening, and at Friday noon he has to show Sherry Lansing and the rest of the Fox brass a segment of *The King of Comedy*. Replacing Scorsese's native apocalyptic pessimism is a relaxed, almost impish sense of the absurd.

Like David Bowie's alien in *The Man*



Heere's Marty—rehearsing a fantasy sequence with Jerry Lewis, who offers a suggestion to co-star Robert De Niro and cameo player Liza Minnelli.

Who Fell to Earth, Scorsese lives and works surrounded by video monitors and audio equipment. His stereo speakers stand as tall as he does. Videocassettes line his bookshelves, making for a cozy, polyresin wallpaper. In the lacunae unfilled by movie books, cassettes, or hardware are movie posters, stills, and awards yet to be hung. It is hard to tell whether he is proud of or puzzled by the Finnish and German citations for *Raging Bull*—probably both. The vintage one-sheets of Michael Powell's films are the most conspicuous in Scorsese's collection, with *The Red Shoes* dancing, *Tales of Hoffman* stair-climbing, and *Colonel Blimp* flying off the walls. Pearl and Lewt (Jennifer Jones and Gregory Peck in *Duel in the Sun*) cast overheated

Scorsese is afflicted with the dilemma of celebrity, not unlike the conflict between aspirant and achiever that characterizes *The King of Comedy*.

glances across the room at another Texas Lone Star, Jett Rink (James Dean in *Giant*), teetering in a French poster blazoned "Le Gigante."

There's virtually no decorative difference between Scorsese's editing room and his living quarters: These are the surroundings of a professional who lives, breathes, and dreams movies. Love and work are one. For a moment I think of asking him whether he's familiar with the Degas plaint: "There is love and there is work but there is but one heart." Instead I ask if he knows the Michael Powell lament overheard at a recent soiree: that even though he made *The Red Shoes*, all about the incompatibility of romance and art, thirty-five years ago, it took him until this year to

realize he'd been right. Scorsese roars with laughter. "It's true! It's true! Powell's right!"

Wearing 3-D glasses and watching John Agar's girl friend being devoured in *Revenge of the Creature*, Scorsese throws off a deadpan aperçu: "Agar always senses something wrong." The way this workaholic lives, totally absorbed in movieland—its history, aesthetics, and ephemera—is in a sense identical to that of Rupert Pupkin, the protagonist of *The King of Comedy*. Rupert, an aspiring stand-up comedian (played by Robert De Niro) surrounds himself with stacks of comedy lore in his Union City basement. From roaming around the set last year, I remember Rupert's lair vividly. Designed by the legendary Boris Leven, the room was littered with comedy tomes—Will Rogers and Charlie Chaplin biographies, Joey Adam's *From Gags to Riches*, a book about Florenz Ziegfeld called *Showmen and Yuksters*.

Rupert fantasizes celebrity by identifying with talk show host Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis, in a composite of himself and Johnny Carson) and dreams of hosting Jerry's talk show, or *becoming Jerry*.

When Scorsese first read Paul Zimmerman's script for *The King of Comedy* in 1974, while finishing *Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More*, he recalls, "I didn't go for it. Didn't understand it. I was writing something then with Jay Cocks about comedy from a different angle; we wanted to do something about Borscht Belt comedians."

It was only after he passed the script on to De Niro that "I realized Rupert's an extension of me inasmuch as he'd do anything to get what he wanted. When I realized he was to comics as I was to the movies, I understood. Rupert reminds me of the hunger I had in the sixties." Scorsese sees Rupert as the outsider-huckster angling to get on the inside, eager to bask in the limelight. This is a characteristic shared by virtually every Scorsese protagonist: Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets*, Alice Hyatt in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More*, Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, Jimmy Doyle in *New York, New York*, and Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull*. Hunger for celebrity is the dominant motivation for their cocky, cockeyed professionalism, and a self-screwing mechanism—usually the feeling of inadequacy—is the key to their fluky success or disastrous downfall.

New York, New York was compelling because of Scorsese's empathy for both of his antipathetic leads: Jimmy Doyle, the

jazz vanguardist who shies away from conventional success in the belief that if the public accepts his music, it isn't experimental enough, and Francine Evans, the swing songstress who believes music has to be popularly appreciated to be worthwhile. The two reflect the split in Scorsese's persona, a fondness for both the avant-garde poetry of a Michael Powell and the hallucinatory but ultra-accessible fantasies of a Vincente Minnelli. Split allegiances to characters are also a feature of *Raging Bull*, where Jake's and Vickie's needs are clearly incompatible. *The King of Comedy* promises to be vintage dialectical Scorsese; Rupert and Jerry demonstrate that although lonely at the top, it's lonely at the bottom, too.

Scorsese is afflicted with the dilemma of celebrity, not unlike the conflict between aspirant and achiever that characterizes *The King of Comedy*. An outsider whose reputation has made him an insider, he feels hamstrung by success. On the one hand, he presents himself as a recluse, a movie monk sequestered in a cinema cloister, the New York filmmaker who made *Mean Streets* on the cheap, from his own flesh and blood. The other Scorsese is the Hollywood director, hassling with unions, meeting his deadlines, the adult businessman dealing with the real world. He wants it both ways, but is frustrated that his fame has made it impossible for him to make movies cheaply and simply. A quote from *Sweet Smell of Success*, hand-printed on a three-by-five-inch card, is tacked to a column in his loft, reminding him of the contradiction: "Are we kids, or what?"

At forty, Scorsese is too old and accomplished to play the prodigy-amateur, too young and unpretentious to play the prodigal-professional. Although he claims to identify with the success-starved Rupert Pupkin, isn't there more than a little of Jerry Langford in him, too? Last fall, on the set, Scorsese described a scene where Langford returns, after a tough day, to his high-tech high rise: "So here's Jerry, alone in his apartment, picking at his food. People are gonna say, 'It's lonely at the top.' But I'll tell you, believe me, make a film and you *wanna eat alone*." This is the resignation of a man who is an adoring fan, but resents the burden of being adored by fans, and displays the Peter Pan lament of "I don't want to grow up." Every time I ask Scorsese a serious question, such as how he feels about *Taxi Driver*'s relation to John W. Hinckley, Jr.'s attempted assassination of the president, he moans or evades, unwilling to admit the power of his movies, shy of being quoted because he's afraid his



© Steven Sands

De Niro's Rupert Pupkin is a compulsive loner whose desperation is reminiscent of another Scorsese-De Niro character, taxi driver Travis Bickle.

opinions will be engraved in stone. He doesn't want to be anybody's guru.

Will *The King of Comedy* be funny? On the set, cast and crew were studiously vague. It won't have much of Scorsese's characteristic violence: Phil, the makeup man, complained that his most complicated job was to paint De Niro's hand to look as though it had been cut. And what of the audacious casting of Jerry Lewis opposite Robert De Niro? *Disorderly Orderly* meets *Taxi Driver*? Mr. Explosion ignites Mr. Implosion? Scorsese gets animated on the subject of Lewis. A natural mimic, the director makes his body paraphrase Cinderella as he remarks, "Jerry Langford's based on a Carson-type character, and we actually thought of using Johnny, but

Jerry, who's done everything in show biz, has more to draw from."

Did Lewis's extroverted acting inhibit De Niro's sometimes tortured method of improvising within the confines of the screenplay? Carefully, not wanting to speak for or about De Niro, Scorsese answers only the Jerry Lewis part of the question. "The less Jerry does, the better he is; the less he does, the more he acts, I mean, because he's naturally so effusive. Being Jerry Lewis, effusion is self-protection." As Scorsese describes Lewis, I have the feeling he's also talking about himself.

Did he pick up any directing tips from Lewis? (Lewis, after all, was the first filmmaker to use video playback to get a sense of the take—a technique Scorsese employs

as well.) "I asked him for help a couple times," Scorsese confided when I visited the set. "I get confused sometimes technically and Jerry knows how to move his body precisely—you know, I just found out that every time I say 'left' I mean 'right.'" Dyslexia? "No," Scorsese said, grinning. "High living." Scorsese's publicist, Marion Billings, added: "Jerry will kibitz and Marty says, 'Great, great, I want that kind of input.'" The *King of Comedy* crew reciprocated Lewis's generosity by donating \$10,000 to his favorite charity, the muscular dystrophy telethon.

It's not unusual to ask Scorsese a question and be answered by one of his loyal colleagues. The crowd on the set is less an entourage than an extended family. And a biological family. The first thing I saw when I walked onto the West Fifty-ninth Street *King of Comedy* sound stage was Catherine Scorsese, Martin's mother, perched on a director's chair at the top of a scaffold, ad-libbing her off-camera part as Rupert's mother, The Voice. "Oh, the things my son does to me," Catherine cheerfully kvetched after descending from her parrot's loft, a curious combination of pedestal and prison. "I'm supposed to say whatever's on my mind, but I'm running out of thoughts." (She would consult notes, a rough outline for her ad-lib.) She explained that Marty built such an aerie because he wanted the sound to come from "upstairs." Rupert lives isolated in the basement, the underground. His parents and Jerry Langford, the adults, live on a literally higher plane.

There was no reign of terror on the set; it was like a Passover Seder, or, rather, a convivial Easter dinner. No one pulled rank. If there was temper, it was well concealed. After one intense scene, in which De Niro had been improvising on a closed set, Scorsese and De Niro emerged, visibly exhausted. Catherine asked Marty if he remembered to cover the close-up with a master shot.

At another point—during a lull—De Niro somnambulated through, wearing an electric-sky-blue vested polyester suit and improbable white patent-leather loafers. I shuddered for a moment at the thought of the acid blue of the suit being shot against the Japanese-style red-and-black lacquer of Rupert's basement. Kind of a vulgar color scheme—Fourteenth Street meets the Ginza—but one not unfamiliar in televisionland, the subject of the movie. A costumer muttered something about Rupert's "dream" suit. Apparently, the film ends with Rupert's fantasy monologue,

Scorsese: "Movies now aren't fun to make any more." Production designer Boris Leven: "You're not doing so badly for a young man."



Lewis laughs, but plays it straight.

where he's dressed in a scarlet version of his three-piece ensemble.

At the mention of fantasy monologue, I was jolted out of my Godot-like *Waiting for Marty*. Scorsese doing dream sequences! His movies are about the hallucinatory quality of daily life, never the transcendence of daily life through fantasy. Wouldn't this be taking his empathy for Vincente Minnelli a little too far? Or would *The King of Comedy*, with its wacky cast and excursions into dreamland, be like *Stardust Memories*, using surrealism to contrast the hunger for success with the realization that status doesn't sate the appetite? Then, thinking of the opening shot of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More*—that fantastic, rosy image of idyllic things past—I imagined a Scorsese dream se-

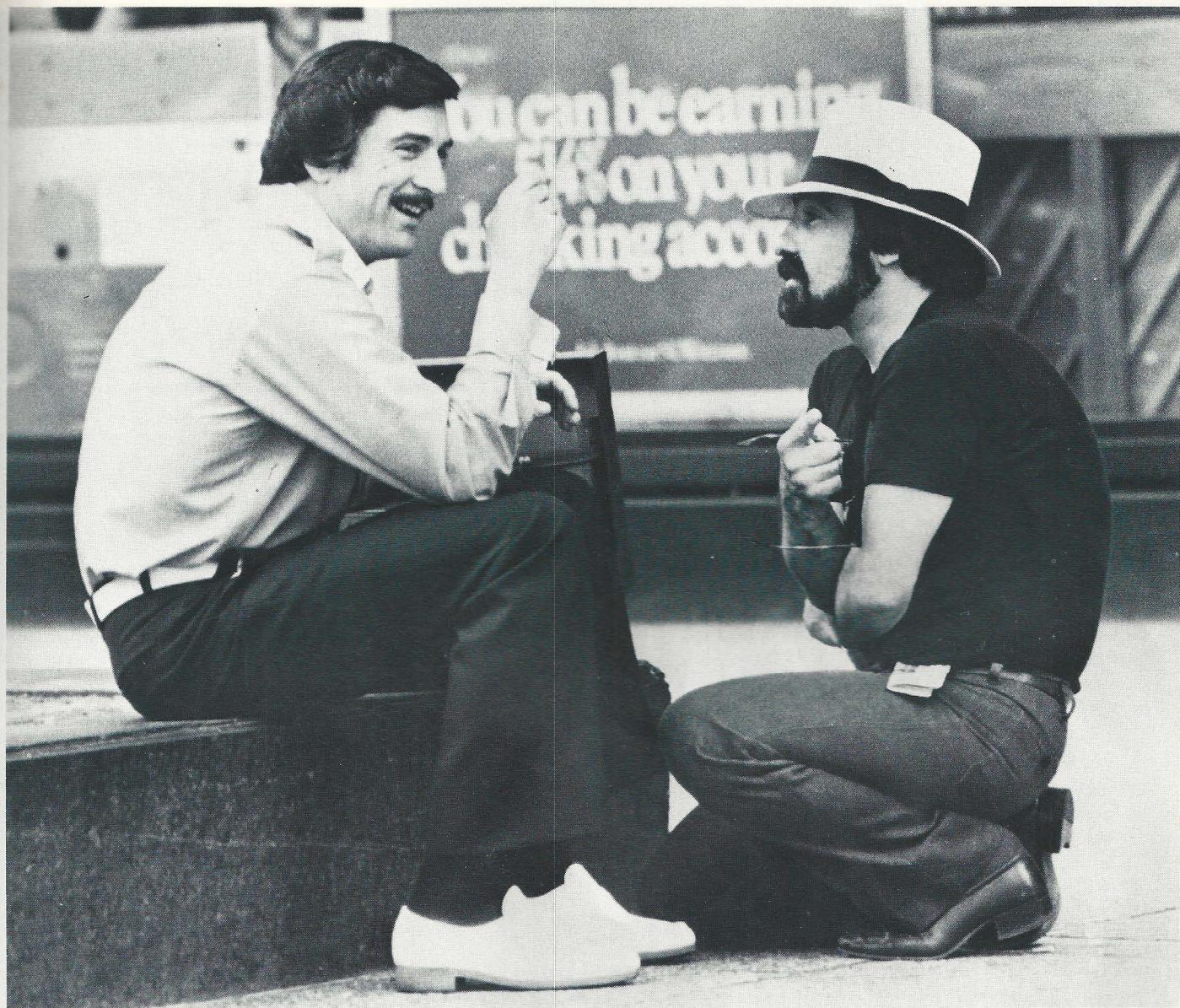
quence as part and parcel of his intensified realism: looking at the past through rose-colored glasses or projecting the future in a scarlet suit.

The next day, in his trailer (which, like his Tribeca home, provides him with basic needs: cassettes and vitamins), Scorsese answered my questions in monosyllables, as though being cross-examined, until Boris Leven joined us. My questions were then deflected toward this design visionary, who created the look of movies as different as *The Shanghai Gesture* and *West Side Story*. Scorsese's logorrhea, suddenly in gear, was the perfect foil for Leven's epigrammatic diction and aesthetic; the rapport between the two was palpable. Leven explained, "I open my mouth and Marty starts talking." Scorsese deferred to the graceful, trim man who looks like an informal Marcel Duchamp: "Boris gives me all of the ideas and I just execute them." Leven returned with, "But Marty inspires me, he lights the match." Working with the éminence grise designer has further connected Scorsese with movie history and given him a fresh perspective on the present.

Leven's conversation about directors he's worked with ranged from von Sternberg to Preminger ("Preminger got bored so fast on *Anatomy of a Murder*, but Marty? Never."). In the hurly-burly world of filmmaking, he lamented, "nothing is simple. That's why when you get simplicity it's so wonderful." Scorsese barked in appreciative laughter.

Leven, while admitting daytime shots look ludicrous when filmed on a set, said he prefers the studio to location work. In *West Side Story* a real location was matched to a studio set, a Leven audacity that contributed an original, surreal effect. When I mentioned this to him, he smiled, confessing, "Only the"—he snapped his fingers in imitation of the Jets' hand jive—"was shot outside, everything else is inside the studio!"

Although the television-world setting of *The King of Comedy* required interior shooting—production stills show a "Jerry Langford Hour" featuring Liza Minnelli and Dr. Joyce Brothers—the company also had to shoot many exterior scenes. "There's no control outside," Leven quietly moaned, echoing Scorsese's exhaustion during location shooting. Scorsese said he had planned for *The King of Comedy* to be a cheap and simple movie, "like *Mean Streets*." But with a major studio financing a film by a director of his reputation, simplicity and speed turned into complication and slowdown. Scorsese complained,



De Niro and Scorsese: The rapport is total, both on screen and off.

© Steven Sands

"Movies now aren't fun to make any more," Leven, with a tolerant smile, said, "You're not doing so badly for a young man."

Ten months later I ask Scorsese, at home and editing the film with Thelma Schoonmaker, whether he thinks productions of the old-style studio system were more efficient than the free-form, deal-to-deal independent arrangements he has wrought for himself. He starts listing the pros and cons: The positive aspects of a studio, where makeup, scenery, and costume departments don't have to start from square one, are appealing, admittedly, but are outweighed by the hierarchical format in which movies are generated by executives,

not filmmakers. Scorsese laughs. "They got you either way—I don't know who 'they' are—there's good and there's bad either route. It's a case of perfect paranoia."

Schoonmaker, Scorsese's longtime friend, and his editor on *Raging Bull*, recalls first meeting Scorsese twenty years ago at New York University. She was a philosophy student who answered an ad in the *New York Times* for an assistant editor, and went to NYU for an intensive editing course in which Scorsese was also enrolled. "He was incredibly intense, hadn't slept for days, and sat, wide-eyed, next to the editing table. I thought he was awake, but he was sleeping with his eyes open." (Quite a metaphor for filmmaking, dreaming and open-eyed at once.)

Though on the set Scorsese groaned when I asked him about upcoming projects, now he animatedly acknowledges the future. One effort is *The Last Temptation of Christ*, featuring a libertine Jesus—"It doesn't pay attention to the known landmarks of the story," Scorsese says with a chuckle—from Paul Schrader's adaptation of the 1960 novel by Nikos Kazantzakis. Would De Niro play Christ? "It's, like, wide open," he says evasively. "I want to do the thing simple and cheap," insists Scorsese in the same words he used to describe how he wanted, and failed, to make *The King of Comedy*. Is Scorsese too big to make a small picture?

His modus operandi has been to wind up a feature film by zapping out a documentary. *Italianamerican* (a profile of his par-

Paul Zimmerman: "Screenwriting Is Like the Priesthood"

The name of the screenwriter of *The King of Comedy* may be a familiar one to filmgoers, not for his screen credits, but for his film reviews. During the late sixties and early seventies, Paul Zimmerman wrote about films for *Newsweek*. New York writer Georgia Brown recently talked with Zimmerman about his long struggle to bring his screenplay for *The King of Comedy* to the screen.

Question: While you were reviewing movies for *Newsweek*, were you writing or thinking of writing scripts?

Paul Zimmerman: You look at movies—you see three, four, five a week—and if you have an imaginative life, you get ideas. You start writing them down. Screenwriting was not a decision. It's probably like the priesthood—you know, it chooses you. My earliest impulses, my training, were in literature, languages, and writing, but from various perspectives. I have degrees from Amherst, Berkeley, the Sorbonne, and the Columbia School of Journalism. The last was when I began to think about making a living.

Question: What was the genesis of *The King of Comedy*?

Zimmerman: In 1970, I saw a "David Susskind Show" on autograph hunters, and thought, My God, they're just like assassins. I also read a piece in *Esquire* about a guy who kept a diary of talk-show

hosts as though they were his friends. I began to imagine the possibility of one of these fringe people developing in his head a personal relationship with a television personality, and then their getting together somehow.

Question: What did you do with your first treatment of the subject?

Zimmerman: Robert Lantz's agency sent it to Robert Evans, who liked it, and he gave it to Milos Forman, who liked it. For ten weeks Milos came out to our house in Pennsylvania and lived with us and we developed the script. But Milos had his own idea of the story and the characters. We ended up doing separate versions. Paramount went with Milos's. Buck Henry worked on that one and it became "Harry, the King of Comedy." For three years they tried to raise money and I held my version back. Finally I sent it to Marty Scorsese, and he sent it to De Niro. Bobby was the one who really loved it. We met and he talked about it the way I wouldn't dare to except to my closest friends. He said he wanted to do it, but he had five pictures to do first. Well, I thought, Five pictures, ten weeks each, that won't be so long. It took six years.

Question: Did you worry during that time that he would change his mind?

Zimmerman: It was just his word—no contract or anything—but I trusted him. Somehow you know that Bobby is trustworthy. He saw the story the way I did. Originally, though, he wanted Mike Cimino to direct. When I talked to Cimino, he turned out to have another idea entirely about the script. Fortunately, from my point of view, he got bogged down in *Heaven's Gate* and Bobby went back to Marty.

Then Marty and Bobby took my script out to Long Island for two weeks to work

on it. I was terrified. I've seen my scripts punched up until nothing recognizable is left. It's like getting back the mangled corpse of your child.

Question: It's been nearly thirteen years. Is *The King of Comedy* the movie you wrote?

Zimmerman: The script which Marty and Bobby returned to me was all mine—with maybe one new scene in it. I was absolutely gratified. In the shooting they brought themselves to it—in improvisation, all the creative overlay. The tone is tougher, darker, I think, than what I wrote. My sense of the world is ventilated but theirs is, too. I know what are called "collaborations," and they're usually the triumph of the strongest collaborator. But this was the real thing.

Question: What do you attribute this to?

Zimmerman: Marty has a gift. It's not just that he is creative but he creates an atmosphere where everyone else is creative. When he shoots, he says, "That's good, let's do it again." Never, "That's no good, do it again." Here's an example. Jerry Lewis had this idea about the ending which Marty told me. I shook my head. Marty said, "Don't do that! Never shake your head, listen to everyone."

It turned out that Lewis had a strong feeling that the ending we were going with was not right for his character. Marty went with Lewis's instinct. He sacrificed theatricality for the integrity of the actor's experience. He's dedicated to authenticity; he's a genuine Catholic social realist.

Question: You have these two Catholics realizing what I imagine had been essentially a Jewish story. What did De Niro bring to the character of Rupert Pupkin?

Zimmerman: He did what was crucial—which was to make Rupert sympathetic

ents), *The Last Waltz* (documenting the Band's last concert), and *American Boy* (a chronicle of his pal, the gun salesman in *Taxi Driver*) were made in between *Mean Streets*, *New York, New York*, and *Raging Bull*. And there might be a documentary in the cards after he finishes editing *The King of Comedy*. Michael Powell is producing *13 Ways to Kill a Poet*, an omnibus of short films on the deaths of great artists, and Scorsese proposes to profile Ernie Kovacs, poet laureate of television.

Other plans? For someone so wrapped up in his work, it's not surprising that the man who makes movies for his business watches them (on cassette, mostly) for pleasure. Among the films he has been watching while editing: *From the Life of the Marionettes*, *Oh, God!*, *Street Scene*, *The Chap-*

man Report, *Shack Out on 101*, and a PBS documentary on Caravaggio. "I don't know much about painting," Scorsese confesses, "but I like him." Caravaggio-style chiaroscuro and crimson are prominent elements in *New York, New York* and *The King of Comedy*. (Scorsese's eyebrows arch in surprise when I mention this.) And, fittingly, even his activism is related to the movies: He's playing a lead role in the crusade for color film preservation.

I ask the movie monk if he's seen any recent movies. "No," he says, then corrects himself: *Poltergeist*, which he likes, and films by David Cronenberg (*Scanners*, *Rabid*, *The Brood*), about whom he's wildly enthusiastic. "Cronenberg's got a vision, a sensibility," says Scorsese, gesturing with open hands to convey his admiration. He

likes Mel Brooks's *History of the World, Part I*, and does a wicked impersonation of Brooks's Roman stand-up comedian bombing at Caesar's Palace: "When you die here at the Palace, you *really* die," mimicks Scorsese, who has a Borscht Belt in joke karate.

Somewhat offhandedly I mention that he seems happier and more optimistic than on the set. "I'm sounding optimistic?" Scorsese demands in mock rage. "You're ruining my whole image." He reflects for a millisecond. "I'm not that much of an optimist, because I believe: Why be disappointed?"

The cable-connected Advent screen, which was displaying an ethnographic film moments earlier, is now doing the horoscope rundown. We study the screen.

even when he is so ruthless and obnoxious. Bobby develops this wonderful vulnerability, this openness and innocence, that I now see as essential.

Question: How much of you is in Rupert?
Zimmerman: I was raised as a careerist, by my father, particularly: Achieve, achieve, make it, make it. The message was: If you don't make it, you're nothing, you're as good as dead. The first line of the screenplay as I wrote it was: "Are you Somebody?" It's a horrible way to look at your life—that it only has meaning in a public sense. But it's very American—American male, especially.

Question: For an obsessive, driven man, you appear to live a bucolic family life—in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Why aren't you in Los Angeles?

Zimmerman: Living in L.A. you may always be too aware of the "business," always thinking about what projects are hot, having your material dictated by the core audience, which is under thirty. Production decisions are made by committee, and committees always make the safe decision. Now, of course, all they want are children's movies. Movies about grown-up experiences are a "select category." I want to write comedy—either about human behavior or about politics. There's no tradition here of a political cinema. We don't use movies to criticize leaders or the process or the balance between classes. It's not even that the Hollywood corporations are hostile to the message. If the message would make money, they'd be for it. For years Peter Benchley and I worked with Alan Pakula on an antinuclear comedy. Suddenly there's interest in that property. But I wouldn't say that means there's a new Hollywood. In other words, it's the same thing.

Scorsese, of course, is a Scorpio (remember Harvey Keitel in *Alice* with his Scorpion string tie?), and his astrological forecast is the perfect admonition for his Friday meeting with the Fox brass: "Collect facts to convince those you need to impress." Quaking with laughter, Scorsese and Schoonmaker sit down at the editing table to do just that, geared up to work around the clock until the Friday deadline. The workplace is charged with atmospheric adrenalin. As if to prove Degas and Powell wrong, Scorsese may have successfully grafted love and work together: Instead of bisecting his affections, it looks as though he's doubling his pleasure. ■

Carrie Rickey is a film critic for the *Village Voice*.

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Hitler, A Script From Germany

J. Hoberman

The publication of Syberberg's screenplay is an occasion to reappraise his seven-hour antispectacle.

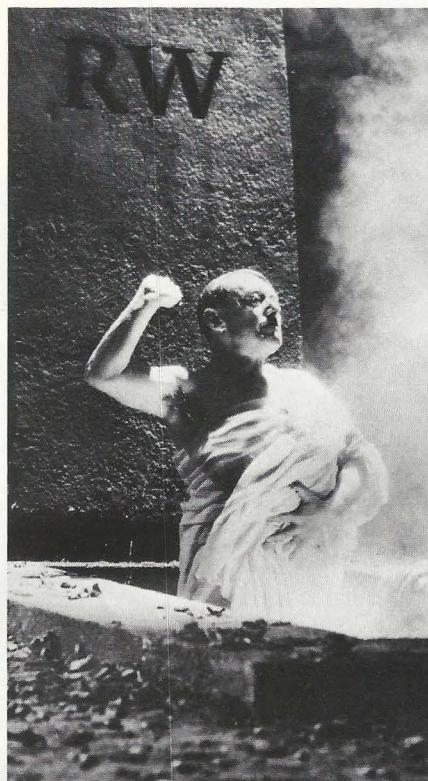
Hitler, a Film From Germany by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, \$19.95; paper, \$10.95.

The most notorious avant-garde film of the last decade, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Hitler, a Film From Germany* broke innumerable national taboos and elicited suitable outrage in the country of its origin. Movies like *L'Age d'Or* or *The Chelsea Girls* shocked their early audiences with what they showed (or didn't show); *Hitler*—one of the few avant-garde films made from a script—shocked with what it said.

Two years after its American premiere, the publication of Syberberg's scenario in an English translation by Joachim Neugroschel should stimulate reappraisal of the film. The scandal in this country—where Francis Ford Coppola's misleading "Our" prefaced the original title and Susan Sontag's judgment ("One of the great works of art of the twentieth century") emblazoned the ad like a provocation—was less political than aesthetic: *Hitler* was mugged by a combination of its own hype and the public's thwarted expectations.

Some viewers surely hoped to be titillated by seven hours of Nazi fantasies even more lurid than *The Damned*. Because *Hitler* was devoted to the exposure—rather than the gratification—of such fantasies, they responded with a disappointed, defensive anger. Others, unfamiliar with anything but conventional film language, were frustrated by Syberberg's long takes, eschewal of crosscutting, and Brechtian theatricality. Thus many critics petulantly dismissed *Hitler* as badly made or tedious (for example, as "inept" as *Flaming Creatures*, as "boring" as *Wavelength*, and even longer than Andy Warhol's *Sleep*).

More sophisticated objections concerned Syberberg's view of history. *Hitler* was the



Hitler emerges from the grave of Wagner.

culmination of a series of films locating the cultural origins of the Third Reich in the utopian yearnings and anti-industrial nostalgia of German romantics like Richard Wagner, his patron Ludwig II of Bavaria, and pulp writer Karl May (not to mention the *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total art work] ambitions of Wagner and Ludwig). Because he minimized the conventional materialist analyses of German fascism, Syberberg was accused of runaway metaphysics, even of following Goebbels in his preference for myth over psychology.

The charge that *Hitler* is poor filmmaking is probably best ignored. After all, the originality and (in some sequences) genius

of Syberberg's *mise-en-scène* is evident on the screen: With its outsize props, marvelous rear-screen projections, startling Bunraku-style dolls, and downbeat junkyard setting, *Hitler* is a brilliantly tawdry and appropriately amateurish antispectacle—part illustrated lecture, part symphony, part circus sideshow, part fever dream. "A child's world," Syberberg calls it in his introduction to the script; it's a world in which puppets are given as much emphasis as human actors. *Hitler* cost well under \$500,000 (less than \$70,000 per hour), and Syberberg's inventive visual pragmatism helps keep the film honest even during its most rhetorically self-indulgent passages.

The frame enlargements in the published screenplay can't always save Syberberg's ponderous homilies, but, if nothing else, this edition of *Hitler*'s script (prefaced by excerpts from Syberberg's manifesto "Art As Salvation From the German Misery" as well as a shortened version of Sontag's eloquent essay on the film) offers additional proof of *Hitler*'s formal complexity. Despite its apparent reliance on *mise-en-scène*, *Hitler* is profoundly an exercise in montage. "Germany is equal to Hitler, Stalingrad has something to do with Karl May, Indians with the Waffen SS," Syberberg writes in his introduction. "The mother's death and Christmas at Stalingrad are connected as they can only be by a film."

The script makes clear to Americans what would be obvious to an educated German audience: Syberberg juxtaposes historical artifacts ranging from Nazi-era 8mm movies taken by private citizens to the memoirs of Hitler's valet to official radio broadcasts. The broadcasts, in particular, are used superbly to create a ghostly equivalent of the "folk community" that Nazi propaganda specialized in orchestrating. Like transmissions from outer space, these memories of "living"

fascism counterpoint Syberberg's prolix musings even as they underscore the film's characteristic movement—a stately oscillation between nazism as mad delusion and the Third Reich as banal reality.

Hitler's second section, "A German Dream," begins with an evocation of Karl May, then plunges into a fairground exposition of Weimar's most racist, insane yearnings for a New Order. Dr. Caligari brandishes the Spear of Destiny; the set is overrun by fireworks and snow machines that illustrate the occult cosmology of Nazi pseudoscientist Hans Horbinger; a madman raves about flying saucers and "cosmic police" at a gathering of mannequins.

Inevitably, "A German Dream" ends with a sequence of transcendent banality. For forty minutes, Hitler's valet (who earlier introduces himself as "the bottom rung of the hierarchy, the voter who voted [Hitler] in, the soldier who was detailed to him and stood by him") recites an absurd, grinding litany of uniforms pressed and socks worn, with the empty, increasingly outsize rooms of the Reichskanzlei projected behind him as if to suggest a mythic Valhalla or the ogre's castle in a fairy tale. The sequence occurs dead center in the film, with wartime Christmas broadcasts from German fronts all over the Western world punctuating the servant's memoirs and reinforcing their placement in the eye of the hurricane.

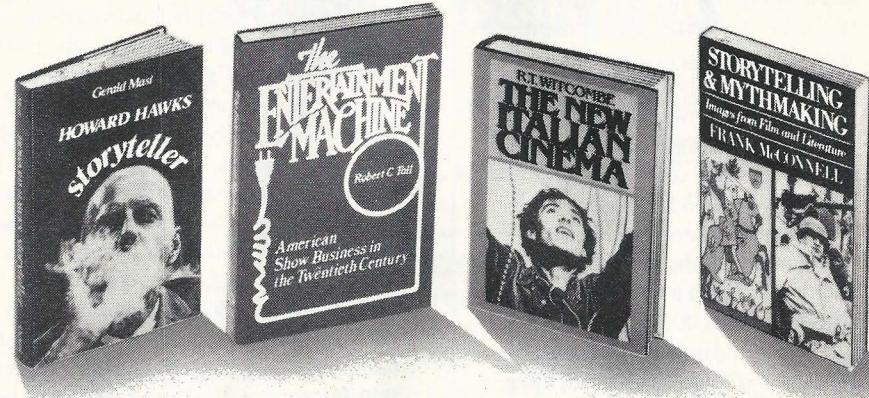
The valet's recitation is crucial to any understanding of *Hitler*. Without recourse to emotionally loaded stories of Nazi atrocities, Syberberg is able to telescope the well-worn notions of evil's "banality," the proverbial great man and his valet, the German passion for order, and an illustration of idiotic obedience. The comfort of the Reich is evoked even as the enduring glamour of nazism is satirized. (These memoirs, and others like them, were best-sellers in postwar Germany.) Of course, the joke is partially on us for even being interested in such trivia. The anti-Syberberg diatribe that Henry Pachter published in *Cineaste* singled out this sequence for its pointless boredom, adding, "Strangely, the decidedly anti-Fascist audience in New York . . . seemed quite interested in Hitler's underwear, shoes, and similarly inane subjects," without noting the contradiction.

This is the dialectic that runs through the entire movie. *Hitler* continually turns back on itself, playing the impossibility of making a nonexploitative film about Hitler against the impossibility of ignoring "the subject of the century." The circus barker who introduces the film ("The Song of

Songs, the greatest story ever told") wastes no time in warning us that "anyone who wants to see Stalingrad again or the Twentieth of July plot or the lone wolf's last days in the bunker or Riefenstahl's Nuremberg will be disappointed. We are not showing unrepeatable reality . . ." *Hitler* is not so much unsensational as it is blatantly "sensational." Everything is distanced: Instead of representing the Third Reich, or what Sontag calls "fascinating fascism," Syberberg has set out to represent the psychological identification that made Hitler's Germany possible—to get the audience to think about the source of its fascination.

Part of this strategy is to simultaneously establish and alienate spectator empathy. "Yes indeed, I'm the devil incarnate," a Goebbels puppet sneers. "And I'm a human being who laughed at Mickey Mouse, just like you." Another sort of shock demystification occurs when rotund, baby-faced Peter Kern appears in an SA uniform to deliver Peter Lorre's harrowing confession from *M.* "I can't help myself, I have to, I have to do it!" Kern shrieks while the sound track ebbs and flows with the roaring *Sieg Heils* of assorted SA rallies. Hitler, too, when he finally appears to testify in his own behalf, offensively insists, "When you

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Syberberg has been accused of indicting not Hitler, but everyone.

prick me, do I not bleed?"

The film's most intense projection of horror and pathos comes during its third section, "The End of a Winter's Tale." As the war against the Jews is concretized by a chorus of searing atrocity reports, Heinrich Himmler—the prime architect of the Final Solution—seeks solace alternately from his masseur and his astrologer. In conversations that are a pastiche of actual statements, the SS chief describes his nightmares, waxing grandiose ("It is the curse of the great that they have to walk over corpses") or lunatic ("After the war I will issue the most rigorous laws for the protection of animals"), repeating the phrase "... to have stuck it out and remained essentially decent," as though it were his mantra. The spectacle of this genocidal bureaucrat, his mind frantically warding off guilt as it ping-pongs between rationalization and denial, confronts us (finally!) with the human core behind unimaginable crimes. Seldom, if ever, has the combination of the blind hero worship, narcissistic self-pity, and pious mysticism that inform the Nazi mentality been more succinctly portrayed.

Hitler offended the German audience for which it was made by refusing to let it off the hook—observing that "it was the defeat of arms that brought us away from [Hitler], not understanding" and wondering what if "he had had, we had had, the atomic bomb and the rockets in the end?" The film, as Sontag points out, "takes nazism at its (Hitler's, Goebbels's) word, as a venture in apocalypse, as a cosmology of a New Ice Age.... Syberberg proposes that we really listen to what Hitler said." The director's ultimate goal, as painful for a German audience as it is problematic for a non-German one, is to get the spectator to recognize the function of Hitler in his or her own fantasy life.

Early on, the barker explains that "as we have no Hitler to exhibit," each member of the audience will have to play Hitler "the way he likes to play him even today, at home, in the privacy of his bedroom, in front of the mirror, or on a motorcycle...." Later, Hitler will appear with something for everybody. "They called upon me," he explains in the film's second section. "First the bourgeoisie, to defend their honor... then industry, to drive out Bol-

shevism... then the petty bourgeois, the workers, for whom I could bring forth so much, and youth, whom I gave a goal, and the students, who needed me, and the intellectuals, who were now liberated from the Jewish mafia of their friends and foes, yes, and other countries, who were glad to have a pacified Europe again.... And one should consider to how many people I gave something worth being against."

Even Hitler's enemies are implicated. In his final speech, Syberberg's Hitler credits the British with teaching the Nazis the mechanics of imperial conquest, the settlers of the American West with demonstrating the necessity for genocide, the Jews with inventing the idea of a "chosen people," and the Soviets with developing the tactics of a revolutionary elite. (Earlier, Hitler, as represented by a ventriloquist's dummy, had bragged that "we brought the Russians all the way to the Elbe and we got the Jews their state. And, after a fashion, a new colony for the U.S.A.")

Syberberg has been accused of indicting not Hitler, but everyone. In this, however, he's something of a materialist. Consciousness is a social product. Hitler did not make Hitler alone.

The Hitler film is actually a critique of our present time," Syberberg once told an interviewer, blaming Hitler for leading Germany into the modern world of fast food, housing projects, and industrial pollution. This is the film's weakest argument—and far less interesting than the elaborate movie metaphors that *Hitler* juggles with mixed success. ("If the cinema is the most important art that the democratic twentieth century has produced,..." Syberberg writes in his introduction, "we can use the model of film, its appearance and its treatment in public, to glean a few things about the condition of the general will of a country and its current situation.") It does, however, offer insight into Syberberg's aesthetic agenda.

"Democracy itself, good and old, was the cause of all the misery in the twentieth century," the film immediately proposes. Hitler, who Syberberg never lets us forget was elected to power, is repeatedly characterized as the "tempter of democracy"; he signs off his first monologue by declaring, "Whoever does not want me cares little for the masses," and returns

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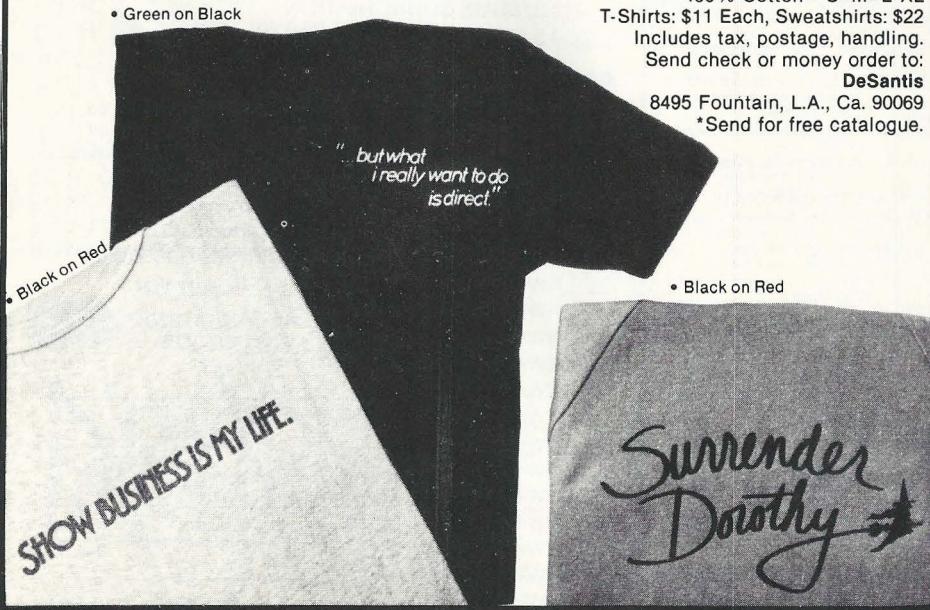
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later to add, "I know the tricks better than any of you. I know what to say and do for the masses. I am the school of the successful democrat." Never does it seem to occur to Syberberg that the Weimar Republic may have collapsed in part because of German hostility toward the democratic tradition only recently imposed.

Oddly, there has been little direct response to Syberberg's political views. Disdaining both the United States and the Soviet Union (as well as their German surrogates), Syberberg appears to be a sort of monarchist—a cultural conservative whose ideal ruler would probably be Wagner's patron, Ludwig II. Like Syberberg, the unworldly Ludwig made a religion out of art; his Winter Garden furnishes *Hitler* with its image of Paradise Lost. Syberberg's affection for Ludwig doubtless accounts for the sustained poignance and humor of his 1973 *Ludwig: Requiem for a Virgin King*—a film that, for these and other qualities, I prefer to *Hitler*. It is *Hitler*, though, that gives Syberberg's philosophy greatest reign.

"I am the antithesis of what life and values have become in Germany," the director has said. "My three sins are that I believe Hitler came out of us . . . that I am not interested in money . . . and that I love Germany." The ramifications of this proud patriotism are the core of "Art As Salvation From the German Misery." On the one hand, Syberberg insists that Hitler is the bitter flowering of German romanticism or "irrationalism." On the other hand, he argues that the blanket repression of that tradition—"mysticism, *Sturm und Drang*, large portions of classicism, the romantic period, Nietzsche, Wagner, and expressionism"—is a kind of cultural lobotomy. Ludwig identified with Wagner's grail knight; so did Hitler, and so does Syberberg. Indeed, his artistic credo could come from *Parsifal*'s third act: "The wound is only healed by the spear that caused it."

Those who question Syberberg's sense of German uniqueness miss the point. If, as Frederic Jameson suggests, there is no difference "between the Federal Republic of the social establishment, of the *Berufsverbot* and the hard currency of the deutsche mark, and the other nation states of advanced capitalism with their media dynamics, their culture industries, and their historical amnesia," that—in Syberberg's view—is precisely Germany's loss and even Hitler's fault. "You took away our sunsets, sunsets by Caspar David Friedrich," one of the narrators laments late in the film. "You are to blame that we can no longer look at a

field of grain without thinking of you. You made old Germany kitschy with your simplifying works and peasant pictures. . . ." Syberberg seems to have cast *Hitler* in the mode of a seventeenth-century German "sorrow play" (*Trauerspiel*)—a form described by Walter Benjamin as a historical allegory characteristically depicting a tyrant's downfall amid "the ceremonies and memorabilia of grief." (The tone is melancholy, the setting is often ruins, and the stagecraft has a marked affinity with puppet theater.) Calling *Hitler* a "work of mourning" (*Trauerarbeit*), Syberberg proposes his film as therapy.

One of the opening titles makes the director's reading of the German character explicit: "If I had in one hand the gold of business, the full beer belly of the functionary, happiness, and all the playthings of the world, and my other hand held fairy tales and the dreams of fancy, the yearning for paradise, and the music of our ideas, then everybody would blindly choose paradise, even if it was false. . . ." Syberberg may be speaking only for himself here, but the truth is that he understands the lure of nazism and Hitler—something his compatriots profess to have forgotten.

Hitler is often labored, frequently irritating, sometimes magnificent, but always principled. It should come as no surprise that Syberberg's follow-up film would be a version of Wagner's *Parsifal*. The film, which premiered last May at Cannes, is more fluid than either *Ludwig* or *Hitler*—and far more joyful. It's as though making *Hitler* was the penance that Syberberg took upon himself to perform before he could listen to Wagner at all.

J. Hoberman is a film critic for the *Village Voice* and a contributing editor of *American Film*.

Short Take

America's Favorite Movies: Behind the Scenes by Rudy Behlmer. Ungar, \$19.95; paper, \$11.95. James Cagney as Robin Hood! David Niven as Charlie Allnut! George Raft as Sam Spade! These are some of the unlikely casting proposals that pop up in this often entertaining book on the nuts and bolts of Hollywood moviemaking. It covers fifteen films from what the author describes as the "so-called golden age"—the thirties, forties, and early fifties—presenting a number of the production stories for the first time.

Not all of the information is brand-new, as Behlmer himself admits in the introduction, but he apparently worked hard to get

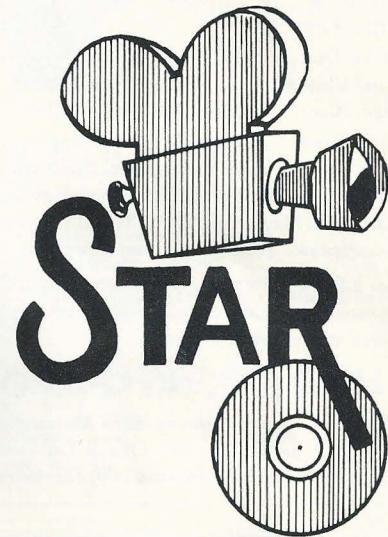
the facts right and is not afraid to admit that gaps remain. He seems most satisfied when he can clear up a misconception, as in the chapter on *Gunga Din*: "There have been some references in recent years regarding William Faulkner being engaged to 'doctor' the script, but there is nothing that substantiates this in the very extensive RKO files."

At other times, though, the book goes off on a tangent—for instance, to a night in 1816, when Mary Wollstonecraft (later Shelley) lies sleepless next to her lover dreaming up Frankenstein, or to the origins of the title character of *Laura* four centuries before that. We also learn that the Frank Sinatra—Dean Martin—Sammy Davis, Jr., movie *Sergeants Three* was a vague reworking of *Gunga Din*. Who cares? Material like this smacks suspiciously of filler, but luckily, Behlmer for the most part sticks with the moviemaking at hand.

The author does not let a great deal of humor creep into his workaday, reportorial style, but he does dig up some amusing, and revealing, quotes. Hal Wallis on a bid by choosy George Raft to play the lead in *Casablanca*: "Incidentally, he hasn't done a picture here since I was a little boy, and I don't think he should be able to put his fingers on just what he wants to do when he wants to do it." Humphrey Bogart to Jack Warner in a memo about *The Maltese Falcon*: "As you know, I strongly feel that *The Maltese Falcon*, which you want me to do, is not an important picture, and, in this connection, I must remind you again, before I signed the new contract with you, you promised me that you would not require me to perform in anything but important pictures." Elia Kazan on the Catholic Legion of Decency's looming boycott of *A Streetcar Named Desire*: "I may be sore as hell about what the hell is done to please the Legion and if I'm sore as hell nothing in this wide world will keep me silent. To quote an old Jewish proverb, if someone spits in my face, I will not say it's raining."

Most of each film's treatment revolves around the screenwriting stage, but Behlmer is attentive to other areas as well, such as the budget and on-the-set high jinks. He gives considerable space to film scoring (no surprise, since he has written on the subject before). And we are repeatedly reminded of the impact the Production Code used to have and of how negative reaction from preview screenings could (and still can) result in a rush of major reshooting before release. Behlmer's book may be somewhat overambitious, but for those who get a vicarious thrill from books about moviemaking, it's good reading.—Peter Craig ■

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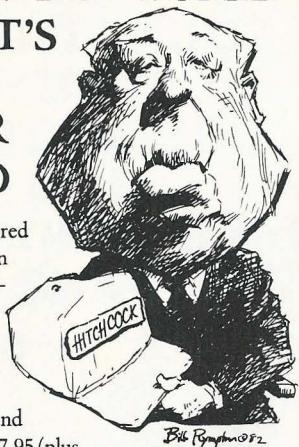
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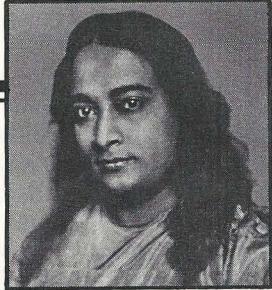
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MINNESOTA FILMS

from page 49

filmmakers. Now there are signs of rapprochement between the "professional" (industrial films, commercials) and "independent" (narrative, experimental films) communities. Their collaboration on FITC's *Finders, Keepers* is just one indication that these two groups have started to talk with each other.

The national reputation of the Twin Cities film community bodes well for future efforts. The *Wildrose* crew included veterans from such films as *Apocalypse Now*, *Tell Me a Riddle*, *Wolfen*, and *Badlands*. Jeff Hayes, associate producer on *Wildrose*, spoke for his Hollywood colleagues in praising the local actors and crew: "I was skeptical of John Hanson's plan to mix the crew. But I was surprised. Nothing against Minneapolis, but usually cities that size don't have that base of professionals. I could tell right away that it did. We even had choices in hiring. I wasn't expecting choices!"

One local professional who would gladly spend less time on commercials is Greg Cummins, who's a walking history text of Minnesota independent film. He shot *Loose Ends*, *Finders, Keepers*, and part of *The Personals*; he edited *Agent Orange*. As Cummins explains, "Commercial work perfects my technique and allows me to travel and learn. I've been fortunate to interview powerful people and have gone around the world. But I do all this other stuff because of the people involved, or the challenge of the project. The financial rewards almost never come in."

Because the styles vary so much, generalizations about the Twin Cities avant-garde are difficult to make, but it's immediately apparent that many local filmmakers share an interest in autobiographical subjects. Rick Weise, Dianne Peterson, Sandra Tabori Maliga, and Peter Bundy have all made films about themselves or their families. Weise and Peterson shoot in Super-8; Maliga and Bundy in 16mm. But autobiographical subject matter is not the only type: Bundy has mostly made poetic, "atmosphere" films about special places (*Laurel Fork, Wyoming Passage*); Peterson has a parallel interest in landscape.

Robert Schwartz, whose *Home Movie* was a moving verité portrait of his father's invalid condition, is now working on a "non-self-indulgent" diary film based on two years' worth of phone calls made to him. (He invites collaboration from the callers.) Roger Jacoby, who formerly made films in Pittsburgh and New York, has

made a multipart film called *How to Be a Homosexual* that encompasses idiosyncratic expressions of gay life. Tom DeBiasi, who is also a photographer and video artist, incorporates autobiography in his films through highly abstract fragments of what may or may not be real events.

Dianne Peterson takes the long view of what some might consider Twin Cities insularity. "We haven't shown much elsewhere, not because the work isn't good, or we're too reclusive, but maybe because it's too goddamn comfortable. People who move here say there isn't enough angst. But a lot of us don't come from academic film environments, so we don't always imitate trends. We don't even try to find out what the trend is."

Minnesota filmmakers, however, now have a channel to the rest of the country. The Minnesota Touring Film Program, a collection of forty-one films by thirty-five filmmakers, is debuting at eighteen sites this month. Largely the brainchild of Bob Schwartz, the program is being funded in part by the Northwest Area Foundation, which saw the tour as a way of encouraging film artists to stay in Minnesota while representing their works elsewhere. The host sites only pay for film rental; all other expenses (including travel for two filmmakers per appearance) are being covered by the foundation's grant.

It's no small coincidence that the growth of a healthy filmmaking community in Minnesota has been paralleled by an increasingly bright funding picture. Sally Dixon, for one, is very optimistic about support for Minnesota filmmakers. She should know: A founder of the Pittsburgh Filmmakers and a former acting director of Film in the Cities, she now heads the Artist Fellowship Program of the Bush Foundation in St. Paul. "This is simply the best state in the country for grants to artists," she claims. The Bush grants, instead of being project based, are healthy stipends meant to "buy time" for a year's work; they are given to ten or so artists a year, including five filmmakers over the past seven years.

Other foundations support film indirectly. The Jerome Foundation of St. Paul (founded by millionaire filmmaker Jerome Hill) awards grants to filmmakers in Minnesota and in the four neighboring states. It uses Film in the Cities to disperse its annual project-oriented grants. Two of Kathleen Laughlin's films were funded indirectly by the Northwest Area Foundation (begun by Hill's parents), as was the

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DIALOGUE ON FILM

from page 20

direct your own film.

Cannon: Yes. You know, we're all artists here. But after *Child Under a Leaf* I didn't know what that meant, and I didn't know whether I wanted to be an artist any more—because it hurt too much. So I pulled away from films, and I didn't do any films for four years, and it was during that time that I began to write and I learned that AFI was doing a film workshop. I didn't know what that meant, except that one of my girl friends had been talking about it and I saw her getting all excited about directing. But I had never had any thought about directing, *any* thought.

Question: But you did direct *Number One*, a forty-two-minute film about four children who discover—

Cannon: Their own sexuality.

Question: How old are they?

Cannon: Five and six. I shot it at a school, Immaculate Heart, in the boys' room downstairs. The sisters were going nuts upstairs.

Question: Did they know what you were going to do?

Cannon: Yes, because I had to show them the script. I had two little boys and two little girls naked downstairs in the bathroom, and the sisters were going crazy.

Question: Didn't you have to cut all the nude scenes out?

Cannon: Yes. That was after it was nominated for an Oscar. In order to qualify for nomination, it was shown at a theater and two members of the Academy called The American Film Institute and the *Washington Post*—this was around Watergate time—and said I'd made a pornographic film about children. It's really a sweet film and a tender film. How *anyone* could look at it and have those feelings is why I made the film. Someone from the California State Labor Board came to see it, and *loved* it, but said, "In order for this film to be seen in America, you're going to have to cut out the little boys' nudity." When you consider what's shown on television—people cutting each other up and explosions—and a five-year-old's penis was against the law! Everybody said, "Go to court and fight it." But I said, "No. I don't want to fight it. I want to make movies. I don't have time to go to court."

Question: Did cutting those scenes hurt the film?

Cannon: No, it didn't hurt the substance. But I now have a European version and an American version. I can show the nudity in Europe, but I can't show it in Los Angeles.

Question: The film is based on a childhood experience of yours, isn't it?

Cannon: I was five and I asked to go to the bathroom at school one day. I went downstairs and there was an invisible line. This way was the girls' bathroom and that way was the boys' bathroom. So I went that way, and I went into the boys' bathroom.

Question: On purpose.

Cannon: Of course on purpose. I wanted to see what the big deal was. Why we had to go to one and they had to go to another, because we all went to the same one at home! I wanted to know what they had in theirs that was more special than what we had in ours. The principal strapped me for that. I never forgot that. The rest of the film is fictional.

Question: *Heaven Can Wait* was another big turning point in your career. But you turned it down four times.

Cannon: Yes, I did. That tells you something about my taste.

Question: Was it difficult working with Warren Beatty, who was both behind and in front of the camera?

Cannon: It was hard because that was Warren's first time directing, acting, and producing, and that's a tremendous chunk to bite off. But he is certainly the best producer I have ever worked for. He pays attention to every little thing on the set. I learned an enormous amount. I don't always agree with Warren. In fact, I disagree violently on some issues with him. But, boy, is he a good producer.

Question: That was your third Oscar nomination. Does it matter, not actually winning?

Cannon: Well, the first time I went to the ceremonies I knew I was not going to win. There wasn't a shred of hope. But as they opened the envelope I thought, Shall I walk down the middle aisle or shall I walk down the left aisle? The second time, when I was nominated for *Number One*, I really wanted to win. They didn't even announce the names of those nominated. And the third time I thought, OK, I'm not going to wait until someone opens an envelope to tell me whether I am a winner or a loser. They announced that Maggie Smith had won. I was very aware of the phony smile I had on my face. I thought, I'm OK, this is really all right. The next morning I went into a deep depression. I haven't come to the point yet where I don't care. If you're going to be nominated, why not win while you're at it! I was sitting next to Richard Burton the last time he lost. He'd been nominated seven times. Seven times!

Question: When you were hot again with *Heaven Can Wait*, why did you do a televi-

sion film, *Lady of the House*? You didn't have to go to television.

Cannon: Don't discount television—I'm telling you. Television is giving us the opportunity today to deal with subjects that you cannot do in movies.

Question: Wasn't the film based on Sally Stanford, the former San Francisco madam who became mayor of Sausalito?

Cannon: Yes. What a woman. I don't agree with the way she lived her life, but, I tell you, she was honest. I'd rather deal with her than a lot of these people who are always smiling and sticking it to you. She was up front about who she was and what she was and how she became that way. An incredible businesswoman.

Question: In *Honeysuckle Rose*, there is a scene where a concert's going on: You go onstage and tell Willie Nelson you want a divorce. But no one told the audience extras what was going on before you shot it.

Cannon: That was a horrible experience. Eight thousand people paid five dollars each to come and sit from noon on. They're smoking their dope and they're drinking their beer and they're carrying on and they're hearing bits and pieces of music all day long. By the time I do my scene it's about nine-thirty at night. Willie Nelson is supposed to be married to me and he and Amy Irving are doing a thing and I walk out on the stage and I say, "I'm sorry to interrupt your concert, but I'm going to divorce this guy."

I don't know whether you've ever been booed by eight thousand people, but it's like being hit by a steam engine. I ran off the stage, and the guy that was hired to drive me for the movie ran off to take me home. He believed it! He got caught up in it! He was going to drive me back to my hotel. I said, "I'm not married to Willie Nelson." He said, "You're not?" The audience thought what was going on was *real*. They were told *nothing*.

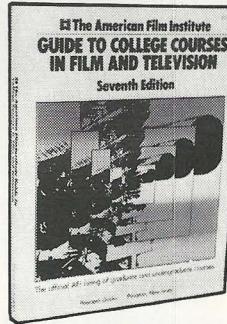
Question: That brings up some questions. How far can you go in putting reality on film? Don't you have to be in control of it?

Cannon: Oh, sure. One of the things Sandy Meisner taught me was that you can't ever have an insane woman play an insane woman, because there's no control that way.

Question: How did the role you play in *Deathtrap* come about?

Cannon: Sidney Lumet called me and said, "I want you to do this part." I'd worked with him before, on *The Anderson Tapes*, so there was already a trust going on between us. I read the script and called him back and said, "I just can't do this movie." And he said, "Well, we'll talk tomorrow."

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A harried Michael Caine eyes a suspicious Cannon in *Deathtrap*.

We talked and he said, "What you've just told me makes me think you have a line on her. Bring all of the things you just said to rehearsal."

Now, Sidney is certainly the greatest utilizer of time I have ever worked with in my life. He takes two weeks before he shoots a film, and in those two weeks the actors, the cinematographer, the property master, and everyone else that's major on that set know what they are going to do. We run through the whole thing like a play, so we have a chance to rehearse it like a play. With *Deathtrap* it was very good because it was a play. By the time you get on the set, he knows exactly what he wants. So he only does two or three takes of everything, which makes it *very* tough.

You've got to be so prepared, because he shoots fast and nobody in the history of show business has ever done faster setups than Sidney; maybe ten or fifteen minutes in between. Sidney goes for a certain mood, and in this movie he wanted very stark, melodramatic lighting.

I had to stay pitched at hysteria. Honestly! The minute I came onto the set in the morning I had to work up the juices and *stay there* until I left at night. I'd go into my dressing room at lunch and collapse for a half hour and then come out and start again. But that's how I accomplished that part. The reason the part was so hard was that, on paper, she was the only character who didn't have any action. She didn't have any motivation. All she did was love her husband, and not even that much on paper. And she was *hysterical*. Underneath the words was that [makes panting sounds]

all the time. That's what you saw and experienced, that inner life.

Question: Would you have wanted to do that for any more takes?

Cannon: Thank you, no. I like the spontaneity of two or three. However, I have also enjoyed days where I had up to twenty-five takes.

Question: Your last film was *Author! Author!*. It was a different role for you.

Cannon: That's why I did it. They called me and offered me the neurotic wife at first and I turned it down and they said, "Why?" I said, "Because I don't want to play neurotic wives any more. I'm tired of it." Then they called me back and asked me again, and then they brought me to New York and we had a six-hour meeting. The next day they called and asked me if I wanted to play the girl friend. It was a much smaller part, but she's *now* and she's *with it* and she's not neurotic by my standards. It felt real good.

Question: Is acting really what you want to do the rest of your life?

Cannon: Well, you know, when I was making *Deathtrap*, I called my manager and I said, "It's the strangest thing that's going on with me, Vince, but I just don't have this need to act any more." The approval that I needed at one point in my life just isn't necessary for me any more. I needed a lot of love and attention, and acting provided a lot of that. Although I love acting and want to continue with it, it's just part of the picture. I love singing, I love producing, I love writing, I love directing, and I want to be involved in every aspect of filmmaking. Acting would never be enough to hold me

now. Never. I'm going to do what makes me happy.

Question: Don't you have to compromise some of the time?

Cannon: Sure. When I made the decision *not* to compromise any more and to only do what I believed in, I was not at a high point. In this town, they forget you very quickly. You're important if you bring in money at the box office. That's cold, but it's true. They kept asking me to make movies, but they were movies I didn't want to make and I turned them down. It was like being asked to parties. Pretty soon, if you don't go to the parties, the invitations are going to stop coming. And they did.

Question: Does that mean that somewhere along the line you decided that material things just aren't that important?

Cannon: I think I made that choice during those four years when I left Hollywood. I have a *beautiful* home in Malibu, right on the ocean, that I've worked hard for, and I just bought some land recently, and I enjoy nice things, but those things are not first in my life. Those things do not control me. The things that make me feel good in the long term are things that feel comfortable to me. I like myself more than I did when I made *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*. I look better to me now than I did then. You know what I mean? ☑

The Films of Dyan Cannon

The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond—Warner Bros.—1960.

This Rebel Breed—Warner Bros.—1960.
Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice—Columbia—1969.

The Anderson Tapes—Columbia—1971.
Doctors' Wives—Columbia—1971.

The Love Machine—Columbia—1971.

Such Good Friends—Paramount—1971.

The Burglars—Columbia—1972.

Shamus—Columbia—1973.

The Last of Sheila—Warner Bros.—1973.

Child Under a Leaf—Cinema National—1974.

The Virginia Hill Story—NBC—1974—television movie.

Number One—Number One Productions—1976—director, producer, writer.

Heaven Can Wait—Paramount—1978.

Revenge of the Pink Panther—United Artists—1978.

Lady of the House—NBC—1978—television movie.

Honeysuckle Rose—Warner Bros.—1980.

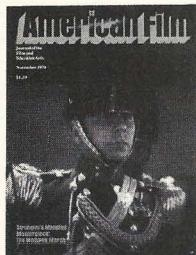
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Deathtrap—Warner Bros.—1982.

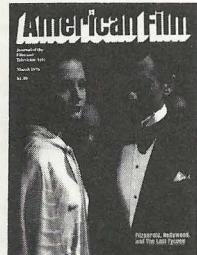
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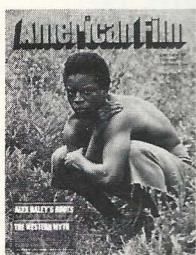
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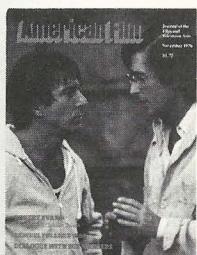
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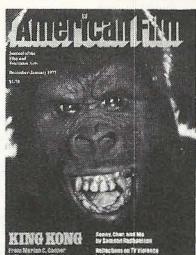
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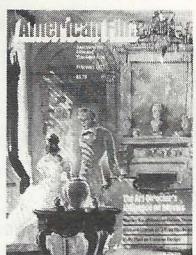
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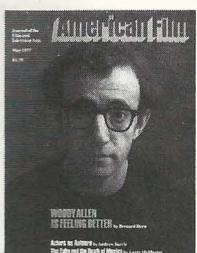
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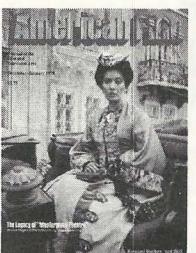
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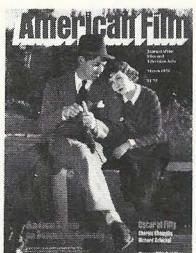
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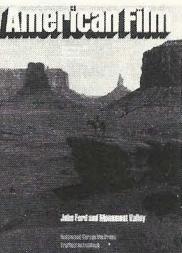
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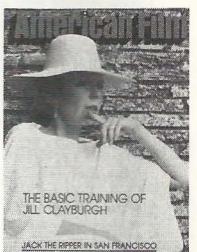
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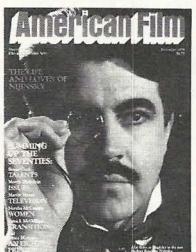
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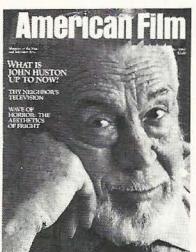
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JACKIE GLEASON

from page 45

which he has become identified almost as closely as he has with Ralph Kramden.

For the first time, America saw Gleason's darker side—and loved it. To see *The Hustler* today is to be shocked at how much Fats resembles Kramden. Yet Fats is a winner. He has character. And grace. There's even something religious about him. He presides over Ames Pool Hall, a place that Paul Newman, as "Fast Eddie" Felson, says "looks like a church... a church of the good hustler." Gleason hustles in the picture—and off camera he took Newman for fifty dollars one afternoon, running ninety-six straight balls—but his overall image is that of a sensitive perfectionist, of one who may have spent an occasional night poring over Teilhard de Chardin or *Lives of the Saints*.

Which is exactly what Jackie Gleason was doing. Although he denies being religious ("My mother was; she was very religious"), he delayed getting a divorce from his first wife because of his Roman Catholicism. And he has counted among his friends Chardin and Fulton J. Sheen. "I consulted Bishop Sheen about my divorce," Gleason says. "And I used to discuss penance with Chardin. He'd laugh sarcastically and say, 'You know, it's different on Fifth Avenue than on Tenth—there people are ignorant and require more Hail Marys.'"

The darker Gleason roles are rife with penance. "I figure you owe me" is a recurrent phrase in *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (1962) and *The Hustler*. In both, Gleason translates the comedic realism with which he infused live television to a Brooklyn-esque film noir. Even in *Gigot* (1962)—for which Gleason wrote the story and the music—he is the saddest of clowns. "I don't believe that crap about a comedian's talent coming from a well of loneliness," Gleason has said. But one need only glimpse those films to wonder.

As real-life morality plays, they were somber counterpoints to Gleason's well-publicized private life during the sixties. He had a Fifth Avenue penthouse, show girls, Rolls Royces, and a mansion in the country that George Jessel described as "sort of a bar with a built-in house." An average day consisted of lunch at Toots Shor's with Joe DiMaggio, Whitey Ford, Mickey Mantle, Bob Considine, and Jimmy Cannon—"all good, funny people"—home for a nap, partying from six until two in the morning at Shor's, 21, El Morocco, or the Copacabana. The cabaret life

was the reason Gleason eventually moved his operation to Florida. "I'd heard the jokes a hundred times, and I was sick of the routine."

But in the early sixties, he was Mr. Goodtime. When *Papa's Delicate Condition* wrapped in 1962, Gleason hired a private train and invited everyone he knew to make the trip from Hollywood to New York. A Dixieland band was obtained; there were show girls, Gleason's favorite press, and nonstop booze and food. At every tank town in which the train stopped, Gleason was challenged by the local pool shark, and won. Gleason orchestrated a similar trip when he moved his television show to Miami in 1966, and private trains became part of the Gleason legend. "I never did like to fly," he explains.

Gleason continued to live high in Florida, sharing quarters with show girl Honey Merrill, playing golf on the course adjacent to his lavish new home, and spending nearly a quarter of a million dollars a week, then a record amount, to produce his show. In 1971, Gleason obtained a divorce from his wife of thirty-five years; he remarried, divorced, and in 1975 married Marilyn Taylor. Gleason's CBS contract was terminated in 1970, allegedly because his variety format was not attracting younger viewers. (Excerpts from the sixties variety show have recently been syndicated for television in half-hour segments by Twentieth Century-Fox.) CBS claimed the occasional "Honeymooners" skits were what the audiences had wanted more of—but Gleason had had enough.

Throughout the seventies, Gleason did do a few "Honeymooners" specials, on television and onstage in Atlantic City, but for him the show was basically finished. And in all the years Jackie Gleason had performed "The Honeymooners" in his family kitchen—living room, he'd heard not a word from his father. The one fan he cared about the most had never picked up the phone.

Gleason's still sipping the Scotch. Outside, director Donner and cinematographer Laszlo Kovacs (*Easy Rider*, *Shampoo*) race miniature jet boats across Ace Lewis's private lake. Producer Phil Feldman (*The Wild Bunch*, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*) is around, and somewhere lurk the reclusive Richard Pryor and his entourage. Pryor is reportedly under pressure from his group to ditch this Uncle Tom role. "Of course, he and Gleason hate each other," one crew member claims. There's no evidence to support that observation—in fact, each actor has praised

the other—but a generational tension does exist. With Gleason around, it's very much Broadway versus blue jeans.

Outside, new Hollywood cavorts. Inside, old Hollywood reminisces—outrageously.

"Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom had the room next to mine," Gleason says. "He had these terrible hemorrhoids, you know. For the hell of it, I took some Tabasco and drilled a hole in several of his suppositories, wrapped the foil back just right, and put them in the jar. It took about three days for him to hit one. I stuck close, and one morning there was this 'Whoaoaoaoaoaoa!' you couldn't mistake."

James Bacon interjects a few tales about Errol Flynn, Forrest Tucker, and Trevor Howard—all equally bizarre—finishing with a respectful nod toward Bob Hope. Gleason adds, "Hope appears on television so often because he doesn't want anybody to see his hair recede. He's fearless, that son of a bitch. He'll do a nightclub act with cards. He'll do a show anywhere and make it pay off. He takes a vacation to go fishing and tells jokes to the fish."

Gleason has his version of why *Citizen Kane* infuriated William Randolph Hearst: It wasn't the movie as a whole so much as the fact that "Rosebud" was Hearst's pet name for a private part of Marion Davies's anatomy.

And, says Gleason, "everyone thinks Ed Sullivan discovered Elvis, but I had him on my show before anybody. Someone brought in his picture, and I said, 'Holy shit, have you got anything where he makes noise?' They sent out and we got this record. I said, 'Nab him.' I had him for six weeks on 'Stage Show,' with Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and he got so good that Tommy and Jimmy were getting angry. They were my friends, so I had to let Elvis go."

Gleason's thoughts have turned, mercifully, away from movies to his great pal, television. "The future is HBO," Gleason says. "As soon as people realize they can get quality by paying for it, they will. The networks will go. CBS wanted to give me Saturday night recently to put on any shows I wanted—from seven-thirty to eleven o'clock. I said, 'Why don't you get Sid Caesar, Milton Berle, myself, and we'll all do an hour? The old style. I know that would be a riot.' Well, they started to ask how much everybody wanted, and that was the end of that."

"Without these people, the variety show is a thing of the past," Gleason points out. "Comedians now are all monologists; they can't do sketches. And they're not great stars. You've got to like a comedian for

him to last. I saw 'Saturday Night Live' when Burt Reynolds was hosting, and everybody went into a vomitorium and threw up. Where do you go after that? And Richard Pryor—well, it's his time. People expect him to do the vulgar stuff, but I think he'd like to do a show without it. He's too good a comedian. We said 'fuck' in the old days, but we didn't say it on 'The Honeymooners.'

"In pictures, you can play a villain. But in television, if they don't like you you're fighting an uphill battle. Then you *got* to tell jokes."

How great was the golden age of television? "The same as the golden age of pictures. Terrific. That era's gone because there aren't any Gables, or Garbos, or those kinds of people left. Same in television. There aren't any more Berles, Caesars, Gleasons, or Skeltons. You've got to be able to do sketches and scenes. That's what *makes* television. As with the beginning of motion pictures, there were certain performers who clicked. Those guys made people buy sets and made television a great industry. Live television was it. There'll never be anything like that again. Today I watch sports, documentaries, and dramas on PBS. That's about all."

Did he have a philosophy of television comedy? "Yes. We never did anything that couldn't have happened in real life. Reggie was the only extension of that. And anything he did, some nut like him would do. And whenever we were doing a scene, we never turned to the audience. That was the fourth wall. We did it exactly as you'd do a play."

Was realism important? "If there's no reality, you can't do comedy. Comedy comes off of reality."

Gleason takes a slug of Scotch, and unexpectedly there is laughter. Except that Jackie Gleason is not laughing. The Scotch has gone down the wrong way. He's choking. Someone slaps him on the back. Gleason heaves convulsively. His eyes water, mucus pours from his nose, and for several minutes—despite his ruffled shirt and movie star accoutrements—Jackie Gleason is pathetic, just a sick old man with a busted heart. Everyone looks concerned. There's an uneasy silence. Then from the depths of his convulsion, as if recalling the comedic traditions by which he, Jackie Gleason, has lived, he sputters: "I think I'm coming down with an eye infection." ■

Toby Thompson is the author of three books of nonfiction: *Positively Main Street—An Unorthodox View of Bob Dylan*, *The '60s Report*, and *Saloon* (Jackie Gleason's favorite).

FILM HISTORY

from page 57

three; by August 1952 more than seventy-five theaters in thirty-seven cities featured it. These were the flagship houses affiliated with the largest, most powerful chains in the United States. Significant publicity campaigns launched each premiere, while networking cut costs. For example, in September 1952 more than fifty theaters in thirty cities carried the Jersey Joe Walcott-Rocky Marciano championship heavyweight boxing match. If theater television had proved profitable, it no doubt would have spread quickly to all parts of the United States. But it consistently lost money.

Many other factors contributed to the end of the experiment in theater television in 1952. Opposition, and other complications, had always existed among broadcasters and unions. IATSE, the projectionists' union, fought the experiment on the grounds that it reduced the required number of projectionists. Actor's Equity, the American Federation of Radio Artists, and the American Federation of Musicians all demanded their cuts. In March 1948, the FCC refused to allocate any separate channels for theater television, despite concerted lobbying efforts by all the major studios. Finally, programming sources were found to be limited and relatively expensive. In June 1951, for instance, NBC announced it would produce a full range of shows for Paramount to exhibit in theaters, with its biggest stars: Eddie Cantor, Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, Dean Martin, and Jerry Lewis. The cost for a seventy-minute show was estimated to be \$150,000. That proved far too high, given any realistic estimate of potential revenues involved, and the proposal was shelved.

Studios hoped for a network of specials fed to a large number of theaters through exclusive channels, but AT&T was never able to clear enough lines for regular transmission. People stayed away in droves, partly because, in the late forties, the process of suburbanization had begun again, after a fifteen-year remission caused by the Depression and World War II. The picture palaces used for theater television were too far from the homes of potential patrons. Moreover, it may have been that the nature and quality of the television image coming into people's homes better satisfied the need for realism than theater television did.

As theater attendance continued to decline, alternatives to theater television, in the form of other innovations, appeared. Exhibitors turned to 3-D, and then, in the

fall of 1953, to CinemaScope (*The Robe* and *How to Marry a Millionaire* together grossed more than \$12 million). Soon after came VistaVision, Todd-AO, and other wide-screen systems.

The studios indeed failed to gain a financial footing in television, but it was not for want of trying. They recognized a good thing when they saw it; their plans, however, were frustrated by a complex of political, economic, social, and ideological forces.

Quietly and slowly we are gaining a better understanding of the nature, function, and development of the motion picture. Film history surveys by and large have not absorbed this new work, but undoubtedly will during the next decade. Through the sixties and into the early seventies, film scholars fought to establish film as a subject serious enough to write history about. That battle has been won, and now a new generation of film scholars, reacting against the conventions of the past, has structured its analyses in nonnarrative form, jettisoned biological and teleological biases, and posited a clear-cut set of causal explanations. ■

Douglas Gomory teaches in the Department of Communications, Arts, and Theater at the University of Maryland.

LETTER FROM PARIS

from page 65

World, notions of individual freedom are often too recent and too muddled, and film industries and other media too fragile, to provide much help. And in Anglo-Saxon countries, property rights have traditionally been favored over such vague notions as intellectual ownership. That tradition is so deeply rooted in thought habits, so firmly anchored in court precedent and contract law, that the United States and Great Britain are probably not good places to win the battle. That leaves only the parliamentary democracies of continental Europe to protect us against the anonymous onslaught and the mass piracy of cable, satellites, and videocassettes.

If that's what President Mitterrand means about creating a European audiovisual space, I think he deserves the support of film artists from all over the world, even of our Hollywood readers who consider themselves as such.

Just so we don't forget the sound of Gary Cooper's voice. ■

Marcel Ophuls is the director of *The Sorrow and the Pity*, *A Sense of Loss*, and *The Memory of Justice*.



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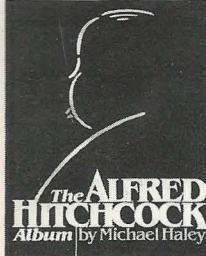
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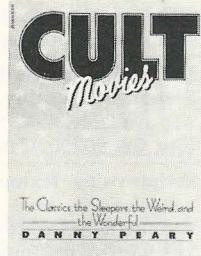
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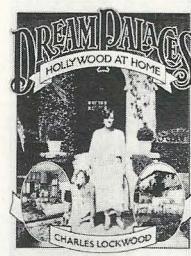
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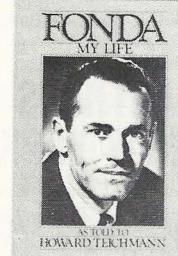
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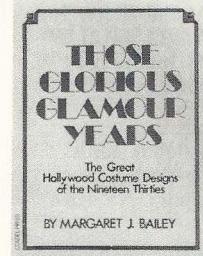
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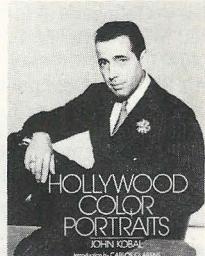
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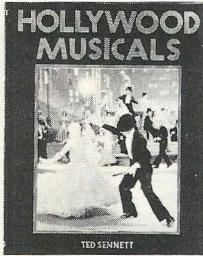
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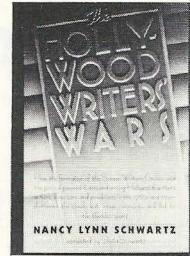
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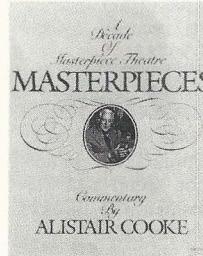
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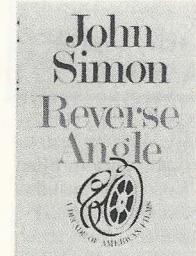
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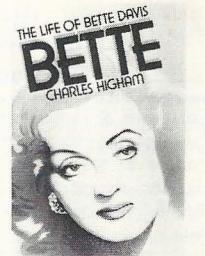
Masterpieces: A Decade of Masterpiece Theater by Alistair Cooke
A ten-year look at one of public television's finest achievements; covers "Upstairs, Downstairs," "Lillie," "I, Claudius," and more.
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John Simon Reverse Angle by John Simon
A thought-provoking collection of film criticism covering American cinema from 1970-1980 by the outspoken John Simon.
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Bette: The Life of Bette Davis by Charles Higham
Using previously unpublished sources, this uncensored biography of the stormy fifty-year stage and screen career of Bette Davis reveals the woman behind the fire and ice.
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Trailers

Still of the Night



Deadly duo: Streep, Scheider.

Writer-director Robert Benton may have been "discovered" upon his success with *Kramer vs. Kramer*, but his first two films, *Bad Company* and *The Late Show*, have their own loyal followings. Both were much darker and more violent visions than *Kramer*, so it shouldn't be a surprise that *Still of the Night*, Benton's new film, bears about as much resemblance to *Kramer* as *Dressed to Kill* does to *The Four Seasons*. In this film, Roy Scheider plays a psychiatrist who is attracted to auction-gallery worker Meryl Streep, even though he believes she has murdered one of his patients. Nestor Almendros, who photographed *Kramer*, is again behind the camera; producing is Arlene Donovan; the supporting cast includes Jessica Tandy and Joe Grifasi. Sounds like the right prescription for a good thriller.

First Blood

Question of the month: Can Sylvester Stallone break the *Rocky* jinx? It's no secret that outside the boxing ring Stallone hasn't had much punch at the box office, but, like Rocky, he just tries harder. In his latest effort, he plays John Rambo, a former Green Beret and Congressional Medal of Honor winner down on his luck. Arrested for vagrancy in a small town in British Columbia, he gets into a scuffle with the police and flees to the nearby mountain wilderness, where his military survival training comes in handy in skirmishes with the police chief (Brian Dennehy) and his men. Finally, Rambo's former commander (Richard Crenna) arrives uninvited on the scene to offer his services. It sounds some-

what like a cross between *Lonely Are the Brave* and *The Pursuit of D. B. Cooper*. Directing is Ted Kotcheff (*North Dallas Forty*); the cinematographer is Andrew Laszlo (*Southern Comfort*); and among the screenwriters is Michael Kozoll (co-creator of "Hill Street Blues"). With such a strong creative lineup, this one may go the distance.

Brimstone and Treacle

A young woman, severely injured in a hit-and-run accident, is cared for at home by her parents. A strange young man shows up one day, hinting that he knows the girl and asking to help care for her. The mother, eager to please her daughter and attracted to the young man, lets him in; the father, suspicious of his motives, resists at first but eventually relents. If the opening scenes of this new British film sound bizarre, consider the cast: Sting, of the rock group Police, plays the stranger (he also composed the film score), and veteran actors Denholm Elliott and Joan Plowright are the parents. The screenplay is by Dennis Potter (*Pennies From Heaven*) and the director is Richard Loncraine, making a 180-degree turn from his recent comedy, *The Missionary*.

Night of the Shooting Stars

The Taviani brothers, Paolo and Vittorio, may not be (art-)household words like Fellini and Bertolucci, but their *Padre Padrone*, a made-for-Italian-television movie that found its way into American theaters three years ago, established them as filmmakers to watch. Their new film has the same kind of low-key appeal: no big-name stars and a story that's about Italy's "little people," the inhabitants of one of its many tiny villages. The title refers to August 10, the Night of Saint Lorenzo; the plot centers on that date in 1944, when a group of villagers defied the retreating Nazis to welcome the advancing Americans.

Veronika Voss

Those who thought that death might have slowed down the prolific Rainer Werner Fassbinder are mistaken. His latest is set in 1955 Munich: Adenauer is chancellor of West Germany, the postwar economic recovery is proceeding apace, and the German film industry is in disarray. The queen

of the German screen is one Veronika Voss (Rosel Zech), who keeps up the outward appearance of an elegant movie star even though her personal life is a shambles. A journalist uncovers Veronika's secret, a longtime addiction to morphine, encouraged by her mysterious woman doctor companion. Someday, *Veronika Voss* should make a great revival-house double bill with *Sunset Boulevard*.

National Lampoon's Class Reunion



Class Reunion's loony alums.

© Twentieth Century-Fox

Just when you thought it was safe to go back to high school, along come the nothing's-sacred National Lampoon folks to trash yet another American institution. The occasion is the Lizzie Borden High School Class of 1972 reunion, which features such unordinary people as the girl who was known to her classmates as a real dog and now can turn into a poodle under certain conditions, the exchange student from Transylvania, and the class maniac on unauthorized leave from a hospital for the criminally insane. The cast, assembled from various comedy troupes, such as Second City and the Committee, includes Gerrit Graham (*Phantom of the Paradise*), Stephen Furst (*Animal House*), and Zane Buzby (*Up in Smoke*). Second City veteran Michael Miller is directing from a screenplay by John Hughes; the executive producer is Matty Simmons, the man behind the Lampoon publishing and movie empires.

November Calendar for AFI Members

BOSTON

New Hungarian Cinema

November 1-6

An excellent collection of five contemporary Hungarian films—*Sinbad*, *A Very Moral Night*, *Stories From The Recent Past*, *The Nice Neighbor* and, from Academy Award winning director Istvan Szabo, *Confidence*. Presented in association with the Harvard Film Archive at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts in Cambridge. Member Discounts. For further information, call (617) 495-4700.

CHAMPAIGN, IL

China Film Week

November 1 and 2

A rare program of contemporary feature films from the People's Republic of China. Of the five films in the program, two (*Song of Youth* and *Third Sister Liu*) were produced before the Cultural Revolution, one (*Two Stage Sisters*) was produced just prior to and banned during it, and *Second Spring Mirroring The Moon* and *Bus No. 3* were made when "a hundred schools of thought" could again contend. Presented in association with the Film Center of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Member Discounts. For further information, call (217) 333-1362.

CHICAGO

Developing Proposals for Television

Sat./Sun., November 6-7

This intensive two-day workshop focuses on the process of developing original television program proposals and series presentations with practical advice about the current marketplace. Instructor is writer/producer and former program executive for Columbia Pictures-TV, Richard Blum, author of *Television Writing: From Concept to Contract*.

Traveling With the Camera

Sat., November 13

This all-day seminar provides vital information for the traveling filmmaker. Topics include selection and protection of equipment in diverse climates, procedures for obtaining permits, expediting passage of materials through international customs, techniques for working with domestic and foreign agencies, and effective substitution of formats when climate, terrain, or regulations dictate. Instructor is Steve Penny, ethnographic filmmaker and author of *How to Get Grants to Make Films*.

Great Performances: Liv Ullmann on Film

Sat./Sun., November 20-21

A rare audience discussion with Liv Ullmann highlights this tribute to one of the world's great actresses. Screenings include *Shame*, *Scenes from a Marriage*, *The Emigrants*, *Face to Face*, and others.

COLUMBUS, OHIO

China Film Week

November 8-12

See CHAMPAIGN, IL. listing. Presented in association with the East Asian Language and Literature Department of Ohio State University. For further information, call (614) 422-9009.

DENVER

New Hungarian Cinema

November 13-26

The complete collection of eight contemporary Hungarian films spanning three generations of Hungarian directors. Presented in association with the Denver Center Cinema. For further information, call (303) 892-0987.

HONOLULU

China Film Week

November 26-December 4

See CHAMPAIGN, IL. listing. Presented in association with the Honolulu Academy of Arts. For further information, call (808) 538-3693.

LINCOLN

China Film Week

November 18-22

See CHAMPAIGN, IL. listing. Presented in association with the Sheldon Film Theater at the University of Nebraska. For further information, call (402) 472-2461.

LOS ANGELES

Independent Film and Video: Financing and Marketing Techniques

Sat., November 13

Michael Wiese, independent producer and author of *The Independent Filmmaker's Guide*, examines successful techniques for financing, marketing, and distributing documentary and short subject films in an intensive, practical seminar. Special emphasis

is placed on "style" in presenting projects to potential investors, distributors, and exhibitors.

Music for Film and Television: An Inside View

Sat./Sun., November 20-21

A case study of a forthcoming TV musical special highlights this weekend examination of the work of composers, songwriters, musicians, and other creative artists involved in musical scoring and production for film, TV, and commercials. Invited guests include Henry Mancini (*The Pink Panther*), Paul Williams ("Evergreen"), Andy Williams (*Andy Williams Early New England Christmas special*), Wendy Carlos (score for *TRON*), Al Coury (president of Network Records), Carol Faith (Carol Faith Agency), and Al Bart (Bart/Milander).

New Hungarian Cinema

December 3-11

An excellent collection of eight contemporary Hungarian films spanning three generations of Hungarian directors. Presented in association with The Los Angeles County Museum of Art. For further information, call (213) 857-6176.

A Tribute to Audrey Hepburn

Fri./Sat. evenings thru November

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art features a tribute to Audrey Hepburn including *My Fair Lady*, *Nun's Story*, *Roman Holiday*,



The L.A. County Museum of Art pays tribute to Audrey Hepburn thru November *Nun's Story* is one of the selected films (see Los Angeles).



Woman of the Year is one of the featured films in the AFI Theater's tribute to Tracy and Hepburn (see Washington, D.C.).

Robin and Marian, Funny Face, Sabrina, War and Peace, Breakfast At Tiffany's, Love in the Afternoon, Charade, Two For the Road, Green Mansions, and They All Laughed. Double features when time allows. Member Discounts. For details, call (213) 857-6201.

NEW YORK

Traveling With the Camera

Sat., November 6

See CHICAGO listing.

The Business of Acting

Sat., November 20

Essential legal, financial, and business issues are covered in detail by top professionals working in film, theater, television, and radio. Topics include: talent representation, the roles of unions and guilds, contracts, tax advantages, and the rights and responsibilities of actors, agents, directors, and producers.

Independent Film and Video: Financing and Marketing Techniques

Sat., December 4

See LOS ANGELES listing.

ST. LOUIS

China Film Week

December 26-30

See CHAMPAIGN, IL. listing. Presented in association with The St. Louis Art Museum. For further information, call (314) 721-0067.

SAN FRANCISCO

Ingmar Bergman: Five Later Masterpieces

Sat./Sun., December 4-5

Screenings of *Persona*, *Hour of the Wolf*,

Special series of note playing at Landmark locations through November

Films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder: A tribute to the late German filmmaker, focusing on his black humor and astonishing technical mastery. Los Angeles (Vista)

British Treasures: A salute to the English screen, featuring long unseen works by such masters as Alfred Hitchcock, Carol Reed and James Ivory. Los Angeles (Vista)

Cinema Brasil: A celebration of sensual cinema from Latin America's leading exporter of quality filmmaking. Los Angeles (Vista)

Werner Herzog: Germany's visionary director (*The Mystery of Kaspar Hauser*, *Aguirre, The Wrath of God*, *Nosferatu*, the current *Fitzcarraldo*) receives a salute to his dazzling, mysterious works. Berkeley (U.C.), Evanston (Varsity), Minneapolis (Uptown), Seattle (Neptune)

Great Ladies of the Silver Screen: The elegance, grace and style of Hollywood's luminous goddesses reviewed in a salute to screen queens past and present. St. Louis (Tivoli), Houston (River Oaks), Albuquerque (Don Pancho's)

A Salute to Frank Capra: A scintillating selection of the AFI Life Achievement Award winner's comedies of America's "little people" that lit up Depression-era screens. New Orleans (Prytania)

Godard Film Festival: A cross-section of works by the iconoclastic and politically-oriented director of *Breathless*, *Contempt* and *Every Man For Himself*. Chicago (Parkway)

Great American Comedy Festival: Woody Allen, Peter Sellers, Frank Capra and George Cukor, are just four of the laugh-makers represented in this cornucopia of classic comedy. Milwaukee (Oriental)

Charlie Chaplin Festival: The silent and sound comedies of the great master are reconsidered in this in-depth tribute. Dallas (Granada), Houston (River Oaks)

Special AFI/Landmark passes accepted. Check with theaters in your area for times and showdates.

Shame, *The Passion of Anna*, and *Cries and Whispers* highlight this weekend film/lecture series directed by Ron Geatz of The American Film Institute.

WASHINGTON, DC

Traveling With the Camera

Wed./Thurs., November 10 and 11

See CHICAGO listing. Two evenings, 7:00-10:00 each evening.

The AFI Theater: The Complete Tracy-Hepburn Collection, Cult Movies V, Bulldog Drummond, and Sweden: The Emotional Landscape. Thru November.

Some of the memorable films included in these series are: *Woman of the Year*, *Pat and Mike*, and *Desk Set* (from The Tracy-Hepburn

Collection), *Road House*, *Badlands*, *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, (from Cult Movies V), *The Phantom Carriage*, *Miss Julie* and *My Sister, My Love* (from Sweden: The Emotional Landscape). The Bulldog Drummond series includes *Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back* and *Calling Bulldog Drummond*.

For program details, call (202) 785-4600. For program booklet, call (202) 828-4090.

Need More Information?

Many activities around the country are in final planning stages. Look to future issues of *American Film* for the details you need. Specific information requests should be addressed to Member Relations, The American Film Institute, John F. Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C. 20566.

What Price Quality?



One day last summer, I received a memo from the publisher of this magazine that contained a question for which I had no easy answer. Tod Herbers's missive was prompted by a particularly difficult "judgment call" that he'd just made, one that involved turning down advertising for the magazine and, hence, revenue for the institute. In essence, the large question his memo asked was: At what point do the realities of business take precedence over the institute's commitment to encourage the standards of quality we have set for ourselves in all of our efforts and our commitment to quality in film and television?

Trying to frame an answer, I reached for my file of pivotal literature, which contains material ranging from Stanley Kauffmann's film criticism to Barbara Tuchman's essay on "quality." At the end of my reading, I thought I had some insights about "quality versus business," but still wasn't able to establish a line of demarcation that could be pointed to when the same question arose in the future. Because so many variables were involved, I felt it was necessary to judge situations on a case-by-case basis. And although I couldn't pinpoint the coordinates at which quality decisively superceded other considerations, I felt, as Justice Potter Stewart once said of another, quite different subject, "I know it when I see it."

The reasons that Tod's question was so difficult to answer ran the gamut from pragmatic to aesthetic. On the most practical and mundane level was the fact that our commitment to "enhance the future of the film and television arts" would have no beneficiaries if we ceased to exist. The grim realities of the world of nonprofit arts organizations demand that they strive for idealistic goals even as they attempt to become self-sustaining, if they are to survive. For those with long-range goals, like the institute, this dilemma can involve some agonizing decisions.

Which projects hold the promise of moving us toward our goals? Which ones will do it without threatening to bankrupt us financially? Which potential revenue sources might run counter to the basic aims of the AFI? Attaining some progress in both fiscal responsibility and idealism may seem a painfully slow process—but it is not an impossible task.

Each of the institute's program directors has had to wrestle at times with problems that pit financial responsibility against programmatic objectives, and it is to the credit of these people that they've managed to be flexible without surrendering the integrity of their activities. When they solicit clarifications, or discuss "the big picture," it is usually—as with Tod—*after* they have made some particular, and instinctively correct, decision. There does seem to be some common sensibility that all of us at the institute share regarding "quality"—what it is, and when it is compromised. I think we'd all agree that, whether or not it constitutes a comprehensive definition, Barbara Tuchman's definition of quality echoes our own. "Quality," she wrote in the *New York Times* two years ago, "is achieving or reaching for the highest standard as against being satisfied with the sloppy or fraudulent. It is honesty of purpose as against catering to cheap or sensational sentiment."

The belief that quality in film and television must necessarily suffer for the sake of broad appeal is too simplistic an argument. It does not allow for the contradictory evidence of artistry that appears with heartening regularity, on both big and small screens; nor does it take into account, on a purely "consumer" level, the savvy that often elevates "good values" to popularity in the American marketplace.

Tuchman does not see, nor do I, why "the presumption cannot be made the other way: that the consumer would respond to good design rather than bad, and to quality insofar as it can be mass-produced, rather than junk."

It is on that presumption that the institute is based and operates. We may occasionally make errors in judgment, but they are invariably human ones, made in good faith. When we're faced with a question that involves value judgments, one that involves the essential nature of the institute and its goals, we err rarely. And so we strive to be responsible and responsive to issues of quality, yet seek financial stability at the same time—just as film and video artists must be true to their own vision while also seeking to find an audience.

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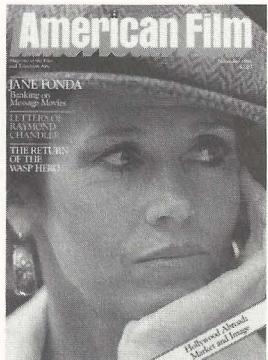
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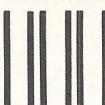
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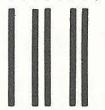
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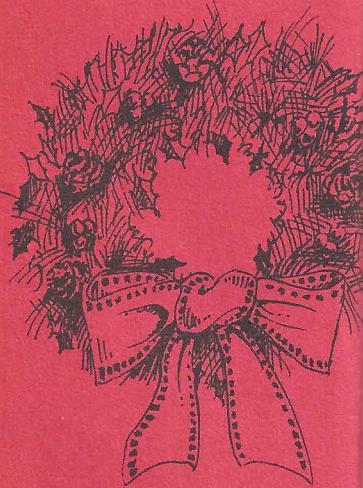
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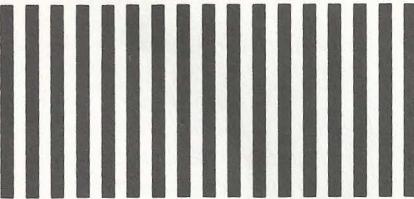


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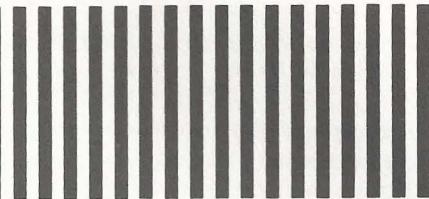
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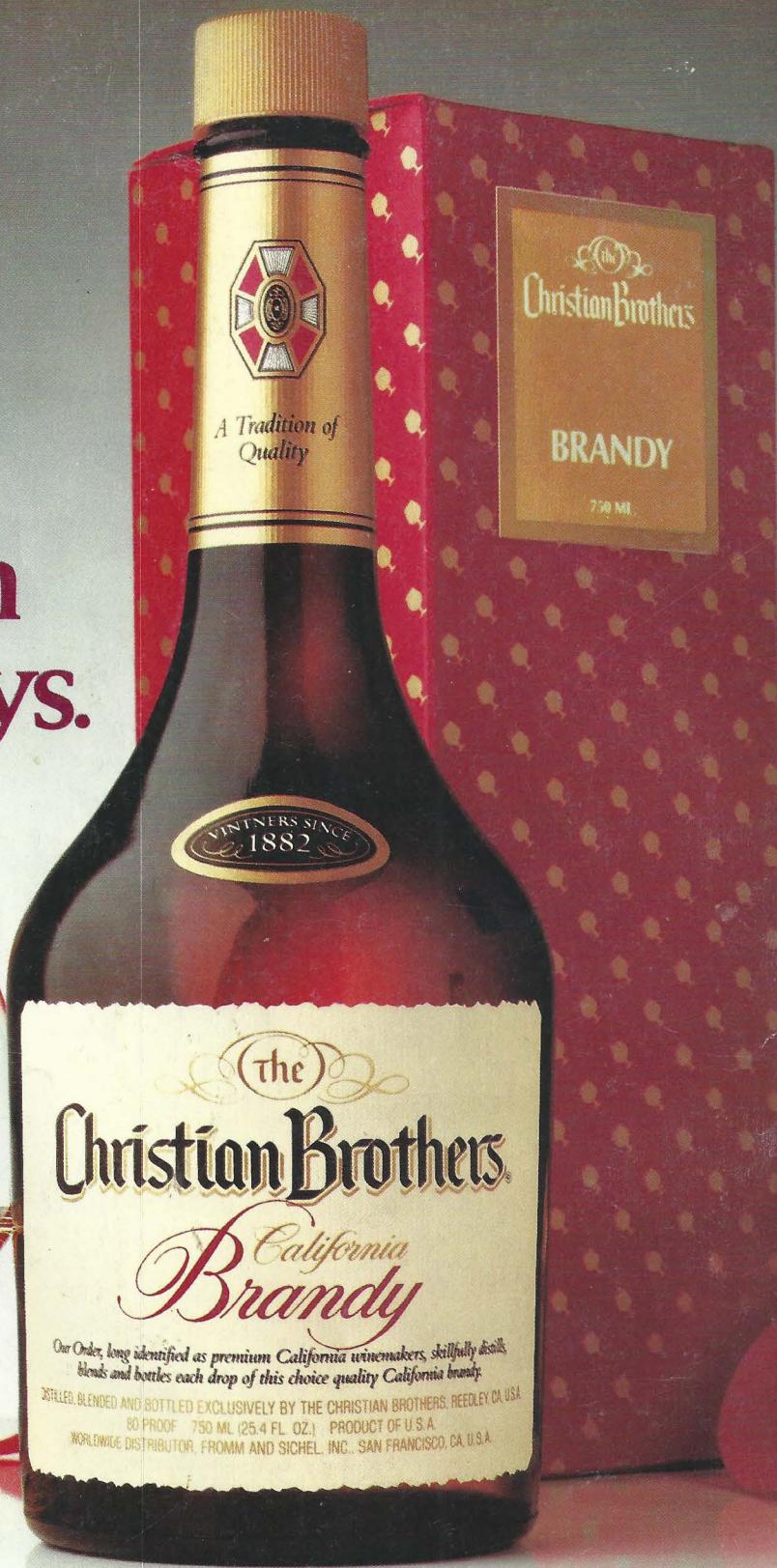
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